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THE GRAND STREET ARAB



HE HAD BEEN SECURELY BOUND BY THE UNKNOWN INTRUDERS, AND NOW THEY HAD
SET FIRE TO THE SHANTY AND BEAT A RETREAT.

OR,

Caleb Cinders, THE NEW YORK CASTAWAY.

BY JO PIERCE,

AUTHOR OF "BUCK, THE NEW YORK SHARPER,"
"BOB O' THE BOWERY," "THE VAGABOND
DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING STRANGELY FOUND.

CALEB CINDERS was a product of the City of New York. Every section of our far-extending country has at least one article to which it points with pride as a notable crop, or product. Naturally, the Manhattan Island city cannot indulge in the vast wheat-fields of Dakota, or the forests of Washington Territory, or, as far as is known, the gold supply of the West.

Its chief product is in the line of human beings, and of these it has a large supply.

Among the many thousands who go to make

up the population of the metropolis, Caleb Cinders was a factor. It was the city of his birth, and it suited him well. He was a boy with a history, and the history was as simple and unpretentious as himself.

His father had died when he was an infant, and his mother was left with two children, the first of whom was a girl six years older than Caleb. Afterward, the widow married again, and, like Maud Muller, many children played at her door. There were six by the second marriage.

Caleb was the unfortunate of the flock. The second husband took a fancy to his step-daughter, and a violent and groundless dislike to his step-son; and, as a result, the boy grew up with irrefutable evidence always before him that the favors of fortune were not dispensed with strict impartiality.

The step-father was not rich, but he had money enough and some to spare, and his own children had all the necessities of life and a good many of the luxuries. Unfortunately, he could not give them brains, and, though all were still young, they were vain, shallow, supercilious and mean, as Caleb knew to his cost. They ignored Caleb, at times, and would have abused him if they had been big enough. As it was, a complaint from them usually caused the step-father to abuse him for them.

Caleb's sister never lacked for anything, and, when still young, she was sent to a girls' seminary in Massachusetts to obtain a finished education. Before her graduation Caleb had ceased to be a member of the family home.

Rebelling against repeated injustice he had, greatly to his step-father's relief, begun life for himself at the age of twelve, and became his own master. When he was fourteen his sister returned with a graduation diploma in her hand and fine clothes on her back.

Caleb called to see her. He came with coarse, well-worn clothing and toil-hardened hands, and his plebeian appearance gave the fair graduate a thrill of horror. It was dreadful, she thought, that such a common person should be her brother, and she requested him to obtain better clothes.

He, at that time, was working for his board, his lodging, and a bonus of one dollar a week. Not having the money to buy fine garments, he told her that she would have to take him as she found him, or not at all. She decided not to take him at all. A few months later she was married, but Caleb did not attend the wedding, nor had he seen her since.

At the time when our story begins Caleb was fifteen years old, and as much cast upon his own resources as though he were an orphan. Scorned by his sister, and hated by his step-father and the offspring of the second marriage, he had but one friend among those of his own blood—his mother!

Seasons may come and go, kingdoms rise and fall, and the world change as the helmsman, Time, directs its course, but a mother's heart knows but little change. When forsaken by all the rest of the world, a mother may be relied upon.

Caleb's mother loved him, believed in him, prayed for him, and would have helped him if she could. She had always done her best to shield him from harm and abuse, and all that he was he owed to her when he went out to fight the world at the age of twelve.

After that she could give only sympathy, love and encouragement, but it was a good deal, and she had less cause to worry over him than before: he seemed to be doing well in a humble way. Misfortune had not crushed his spirits; on the contrary, he was full of life and good-humor, and, being both bright and honest, he bade fair to achieve success in the end.

For the time being he was in the service of Irving Proctorham, a wealthy New Yorker. The latter's residence was well up-town, where the progress of events on Manhattan Island had not turned the neighborhood into a human bee-hive, and he had some land and a good many fruit and ornamental trees around his house.

He had a man to care for the grounds, and Caleb Cinders was an assistant. Caleb's real name was Lyons, but it had among many of his acquaintances, been lost sight of. Among his other duties he had to care for the furnace, and some fanciful person had given him the nickname of "Cinders." It stuck to him, and he usually claimed it as his own when asked for his name.

One afternoon Caleb had been away on an errand. When it was done he returned to Proctorham's and went about his next job.

In order to do it he had to enter a certain part of the stable, but, when he tried to do so, he

found the connecting door locked. This surprised him, for it was out of the ordinary course of events, so he looked for Jason Timms, the man-of-all-work, to get the key. Jason was not to be found. Next, Caleb inquired for Mr. Proctorham, and was told that he was absent.

"Pretty little o' fish!" commented young Cinders. "How kin I do the job ef I can't get in? There's a mat'ematical problem fur you, Caleb."

Meditation satisfied him that there was only one course open to him. By using a ladder he could ascend to the loft window, and, from there, reach the desired quarter.

"I'll do it, too," he decided. "Might get red of it, but what's the use? It's got ter be done some time, an' it won't do any good ter put it off. I'll go up!"

He found the ladder, leaned it against the side of the barn, ascended to the window and entered the loft. This, like the lower floor, was divided into two parts, separated by a partition and a door.

A fresh surprise awaited him—this door, like that below, was locked!

"Wal, this is sort o' queer!" he observed, aloud. "Somebody has taken a heap o' trouble ter shut things up tight, but here's the key. Wonder ef Bluebeard has been here an' fixed up a lot o' scarecrows?"

Smiling at his fancy he unlocked and opened the door. He had never known this particular door to be fastened in the daytime, but the fact that it had been locked on this occasion was not strange enough to cause him to look around critically.

He entered briskly, thinking only of his errand, and then recoiled as he almost ran up against another boy.

He stopped short and stared in bewilderment.

"Jim Cricky!" he ejaculated.

The other boy was much younger and much smaller than he, being a little fellow who did not look to be over five years old, and he made a most melancholy picture just then. His face was unnaturally lengthened, his mouth bore a piteous expression, and his eyes were red with weeping. He seemed just ready to weep again, but delayed the operation to stare at Caleb. And Caleb was greatly surprised. The small boy did not belong to the Proctorham household, nor had Caleb ever seen him before.

If he had been a tiger, his presence would not have taken the larger boy any more by surprise.

"Wal, I'll be chewed!" Caleb ejaculated.

"Say, did you blow in here?"

"They took me in," replied the small boy, with a sob.

"Who?—the sparrers?"

"The men did."

"What men?"

"I don't know."

"Got locked in by accident, hey?"

"No; they did it on purpose."

"You don't say so!"

There was a trace of skepticism in Caleb's voice, and a good deal more in his mind. Every natural inference led him to doubt the statement. Why should any one lock the boy in there? If he had not possessed an innocent, honest face he would at once have been set down by Caleb as a liar of the first magnitude. As it was, the larger boy was doubtful.

"D'ye live around here?" he asked.

"I don't know where I am," was the quavering reply.

"Then how'd you get here?"

"I went out on the street, and some men grabbed me and put me in a wagon, and brought me here."

"Where d'ye live?"

"Up in the street where the lame boy lives."

Caleb shook his head.

"Tain't hardly exact enough, my frien'."

What's yer name?"

"Allan Garland."

"Got any fathers or mothers?"

"I've got one mother."

"Everybody ain't got so many as that. So some men grabbed you an' brung ye here. Didn't you holler, an' kick, an' raise a rumpus?"

"I told them I didn't want to come, and I cried, but they wouldn't let me go," mournfully explained Allan, as the tears began to course rapidly down his cheeks again.

"Remarkable case, b'jinks! Here me an' the other tax-payers o' New York hire all the big men we kin find ter be perleecemen, an' pay them bang-up wages, but a youthful citizen kin be kidnapped right under our noses an' locked up in a stable. 'Tain't 'cordin' ter the Monroe

doctrine an' Jeffersonian principles, an' I feel ashamed. Wal, my frien', you shall be returned ter your home-base, but I've got ter find out where 'tis, first-off."

Caleb undertook to gain this information, but succeeded only poorly. Allan was too young to possess the necessary facts. He stated that his father was dead; that his mother was named Mrs. Garland; that they had lived until recently in a remote place, the name of which he could not tell; and that they had lived since coming to New York in a street where the houses were very big, and where there lived a lame boy, also, but what the name of the street was he could not tell. In brief, there was no clew except his own name and his mother's.

Caleb could not imagine why the boy had been locked up in the stable loft, or who had done it, but he was determined to see Allan out of his trouble.

It did not occur to him to take his companion to the nearest police-station, but, accustomed to rely on himself, he now acted according to the usual rule.

"Tell ye what I'll do," he said; "in 'bout two hours I shall be done with my day's work, an' then I'll put ye all right. Ef I left here afore the usual hour I'd ketch a blowin' up, for Irving Proctorham is a mighty hard man ter git along with; but when I'm off duty we'll jest strike out fur your marm's house. You'll know it when you see it?"

"Oh! yes!" cried Allan, brightening up.

"Jes' so! Sartain! I thought so," Caleb agreed, cheerfully. "Them eyes o' yours is bright as a real diamunt ring, an' I s'pect you're a clipper when you ain't off yer feed. Know how ter feel fur ye, for I was young, myself, once. Come on, my frien', an' I'll help ye out o' your diffikilty, sure pop!"

CHAPTER II.

A DANGEROUS ENEMY.

THERE was something very cheerful and encouraging in Caleb Cinders's manner, and the small boy's heart swelled with gratitude and joy. Small as Caleb himself was, he looked to Allan like a rock against which he might safely lean.

Caleb had already formed his plan. His companion must have a refuge until such time as he could start out, and this refuge could not be on the Proctorham premises.

He did not believe that the house-servants would be willing to receive Allan, and if they were, there would be trouble if Irving Proctorham learned that a stray boy had been taken in. The master of the place was a severe and selfish man who had no sympathy to give to any one.

After considerable trouble Allan was assisted down the ladder in safety, and then Caleb took his hand and they started to leave the grounds. But they were not to get away without trouble.

They were moving toward the street along a winding, tree-shaded path when a form loomed up in their path which was larger than both boys, combined.

It was Irving Proctorham!

Cinders knew at the start that there would be trouble. A stranger on the grounds was the austere gentleman's pet horror, and a stranger in charge of a hired youngster like Caleb would be to him like a red flag to an ill-tempered bovine.

The first thing Mr. Proctorham did was to look astonished; the next was to scowl like a pirate. Then he sharply demanded:

"What's this?"

"It seems ter be a boy, sir," quoth Cinders, trying to be very polite and pleasant.

"What is he doing here?"

"He's goin' out."

"How dared you bring him here at all?"

"'Twasn't me who did it. 'Twas somebody else, an' they shut him up in the stable; but he couldn't feel reconciled ter being either a hoss or an ox, so he wanted ter git out—"

"Shut him up in the stable! Who did it?"

"I don't know—"

"Boy, how dared you go near my stable?"

Mr. Proctorham flung out the inquiry with a good deal more of noise than was necessary, and the scowl on his face was so alarming that Allan, instead of answering, nestled closer to Caleb and began to cry again.

"Didn't I tell ye somebody brought him?" quickly returned Cinders. "He didn't come hisself."

"Did you bring him?"

"Hev I lost the roodiments o' the English language, that I can't make myself understood?" demanded Allan's champion. "Some men that he didn't know abductioned him, brought him here an' shut him up in the stable; an' there he

would 'a' stayed ef I hadn't climbed up a ladder, got inter the loft an' helped him."

"Why did you climb up a ladder?"

"Because the doors was locked."

"You found the stable locked and went in by a ladder, eh? How dared you do that? Don't you know that was a penal offense? It was breaking and entering, boy."

Caleb was beginning to lose his usual good humor.

"Seems ter me you're hard ter suit!" he retorted. "D'ye want this young infant ter stay locked up in that measly hole?"

"I want him to stay away entirely, and I want you to know your place!" retorted Proctorham, as intemperately as before. "You had no more right to enter my stable as you did than you would have to enter my sleeping-room at night."

"Ef you remember, you tol' me ter do a sartin job, Mr. Proctorham, an' the only way fur me ter do it, when I found the stable locked, was ter get the tools jest as I set out ter do."

"That is no excuse, and I cannot tolerate such work. You are no longer in my service!"

"Hey?"

"I discharge you!"

"Oh! you do!"

"Yes, I do! And, what is more, the police shall look into this case. I will say, frankly, that I do not believe a word of your story. That unknown men could bring a boy here and lock him up in my stable—even if they wanted to, which they certainly would not—is absurd. I shall call a policeman and give you both in charge!"

Caleb was dumfounded. He knew that Proctorham was a hard man to deal with, but this was more than he had expected.

"Is this the way you deal with your hired help?" he returned, quickly.

"You are no longer in my service; I have discharged you; but I will say that when my hired help descend to robbing me, they get arrested. I will call a policeman at once!"

He started down the path to the street, while Cinders, still holding Allan's hand, looked after him in bewilderment. It would not take long to call an officer, and then, plainly, the two boys would be arrested.

Little Garland was crying harder than ever, for stern and savage Irving Proctorham had frightened him almost out of his wits; but, after a moment, a flush of indignation colored Caleb's cheeks, and a sparkle of defiance showed in his eyes.

"Hev us arrested, will he?" cried the youth. "Wal, mebbe he will, but he's got ter ketch us, first. We will run, that's what we'll do!"

"He will stop us if we go that way."

"We ain't goin' that way; I don't know of a worse place ter hide than in the streets. Mister Man thinks he's got us foul, an' that we can't get out no way except the way he's gone. We'll show him! Come on!"

Grasping Allan's hand tightly he hurried him along toward the rear of the grounds. There was a high fence at that point, and an intricate area beyond, and a person of mature years would have despaired of escaping by such an avenue; but to a boy all places are open and capable of being traversed.

Caleb did not intend to get locked up.

The ladder which had once before been so useful to him was again brought into use. He leaned it against the high fence, and after considerable trouble he and his charge reached the other side.

Their troubles were not over, for other houses and other yards surrounded them, but Cinders knew of the nooks and crevices as well as the cats and dogs of the block did; and, after a surprising scramble through holes and hedges, over fences and through fences, they reached the next street.

"So fur, good, but we ain't safe yet," the guide commented. "We are now reg'lar castaways. We ain't got no heavin' seas an' rollin' billers under us, like nautikel sailors hev, but we're castaways in the big city o' New York. You're lost, an' I'm out o' a job. Melancholy sittervation! How a philanthropast would weep fur us—ef he had time! Come on, feller-castaway, an' I'll show ye a harbor whar we kin drop anchor fur a period o' time!"

The "Castaway" had not been confining his efforts to words, but while he spoke in the whimsical fashion peculiar to him, had been hurrying Allan along.

He had decided to take him to the same place before considered as a refuge, and the journey was not long.

In New York men have strange bed-fellows,

and the change from wealth to poverty is often surprising. One block may be the abode of aristocrats; the next that of the humble poor. In no other city in America will an observing traveler see more abrupt and unexpected transitions.

Proctorham was wealthy, but it was only a short distance to where a very unromantic coal-yard occupied a small space in a modest way, as though offering a mute apology for existence.

Into this yard Cinders conducted his companion, and his face brightened as he saw a fat, red-faced man standing by the shed.

"Hullo, stranger!" cheerfully greeted this man, his expression and manner jolly in the extreme.

"Say, Mr. Peach!" cried Caleb, "can I leave this boy here?"

"It ain't a parcel office, and I can't give ye no check for him."

"But kin he stay?"

"Certain. But why?"

"We're in trouble!"

"You don't say so! What's up?"

Caleb told the story rapidly, and had an attentive listener. Horace Peach was a poor man who did only a small business, and worked hard at that, but he had a heart as big as his body, metaphorically speaking, and was always ready to help the needy and unfortunate.

He and Cinders had struck up a friendship since the latter came to the neighborhood, and he was favorably impressed by Allan's appearance.

Plainly, the boy was no vagabond.

"Mighty odd!" observed Mr. Peach. "Why should Proctorham cut up so rusty?"

"It's born inter him."

"He ought ter get rid of it by an emetic. But that ain't to the point; we've got this lad on our hands, and must see him out o' his scrape."

Peach then questioned Allan as Caleb had done, but utterly failed to learn where he lived. A Directory was consulted without any good result, and they were left to face the fact that the boy lived somewhere in New York—but where?

"The police could find out the quickest," Peach remarked, thoughtfully.

"But 'twon't do fur him ter go ter them, for Proctorham will have him arrested," urged Cinders.

"Fact! He's in a bad way—and so be you. Out o' work, are you?"

"I be; I now sign myself 'Cinders, the Castaway: residence, the streets o' New York.' That's all the home I've got just now, but, jumpin' wildcats! I don't mind it! I'm like the nine-spot in a game o' eucher; I git throwed out ev'ry discard, but I'm as apt ter be a trump as the right bowler. Never mind me; what about my protegem?"

Peach scratched his red nose, and thereby left a streak of coal-dust on it.

"We've got ter pursoo a decided course," he replied. "If I had a cab, or private equipage, I'd go streakin' it all over New York, but, as I ain't, we must do the next best thing. I have just hitched up to go down-town a ways to get a load, and I'll take you two boys right in, and Allan shall look for his mother's house as we drive."

Young Garland again grew cheerful, but the "Castaway" looked doubtful. Peach's horse was a heavy animal, and the wagon was of the sort commonly used for drawing coal. It was not a turn-out which could cover ground very rapidly.

"Get right in," added Mr. Peach, "an' off we go!"

Caleb still had his doubts, but he yielded without argument, only stipulating that they should keep away from the section where Proctorham and his searchers were likely to be encountered.

All three climbed up on the coal-cart, Peach cracked his whip, and they moved out of the yard.

The Castaway was the only one of the trio who was not cheerful at that moment, and, when he had looked both ways and failed to see a policeman or his late employer, he felt relieved for the time being. But he could not banish the fear of trouble to come.

For several blocks all went well, and Allan was kept busy looking for familiar objects—only Caleb seemed to realize how much the chances were against them—but the progress of the heavy old horse was very slow, indeed, and the coal-cart rumbled on as though a world of time was at their disposal.

Several times the Castaway looked back, and he finally grasped Peach's arm suddenly and tightly.

"Say, d'ye see that?" he asked, excitedly.

"A carriage and two hosses—yes!" Peach replied.

"That's Proctorham's turn-out!"

"No!"

"Yes, 'tis; an' they're chasin' us!"

The coal-dealer heard and believed. The other vehicle, though some distance away, was rolling rapidly after them, going three yards to their one, and, judging by appearances, making an effort to overtake them.

"There's Proctorham on the box!" Cinders added.

"Oh! he will catch me!" cried Allan, in terror.

"Not much!" sturdily declared Peach. "Ef he was rich as Solomon, I'd lam him with this whip if he tried it—but I guess it would be better ter try ter dodge."

He turned the team into a side-street as he spoke, and then applied the whip smartly to his horse.

"Now for a trick!" he added.

CHAPTER III.

RUN DOWN!

PEACH was well aware that any attempt to outstrip the pursuers in a race would result in complete failure, but his ready mind had seized upon the one chance open to them. Not much further did he go, but, instead, turned into an alley where a small business was done at the rear, and, having driven behind the front building, awaited the result.

A short time passed, and then the pursuing carriage appeared. Proctorham sat on the box with the driver, and his gaze was bent straight ahead, with an eager, ominous expression on his face.

"Lay on the whip!" he cried, in a voice audible to the objects of his pursuit. "I will run them down if I kill my horses!"

Another moment and they were invisible from the alley. Peach saw that Allan was trembling pitifully, and he laid his big hand on the child's head.

"Brace up, my little man!" he directed, heartily. "The mean skunk ain't got you yet, an' he sha'n't get you, by sixty!"

"Them is the facts," corroborated Caleb Cinders. "Proctorham is mean, an' I always knew it, but I think worse o' him now. I don't swaller his yarn about thinkin' we had been robbin' him; I'll bet he could tell who locked ye up in the stable, but why 'twas done is a pernicious mystery."

No time was allowed to go to waste, and as soon as the carriage was out of sight, Horace Peach drove out of the alley. He showed his shrewdness by deliberately retracing their steps for two blocks, after which he branched off in a new direction.

Unless the pursuers penetrated the late artifice they would not be likely to look in that quarter.

While they rattled away in the fashion peculiar to coal-carts, Peach did some thinking. What was to be done with Allan Garland?

He was a lost child, and they could not apply to the police, since Proctorham had probably attached them to his cause by making a false charge of burglary against the boys. Allan could not find shelter with Caleb, for the latter had no home; he could not go with Peach, for the coal dealer's house was likely to be invaded by Proctorham's assistants.

However, Peach had a sister, and he decided that it would be best to take the child there.

With this idea in mind he held to a certain course, while Allan looked eagerly at each new block which they passed. As time passed and they saw no signs of his mother's house his face began to grow long and tremulous, and it needed all of his companion's kind words to keep him up.

A change was at hand, though, and it came so suddenly as to startle even level-headed Caleb. Suddenly the child gave a great leap, and then stretched out both of his arms.

"Mamma! mamma!" he cried, wildly; "there's my mother!"

Peach pulled up his big horse with a motion as sudden as it was impulsive, and looked mechanically in the same direction that Allan was looking.

He saw a lady and a gentleman standing on the steps of a plain brick house, equipped for the street. Allan's cry had reached their ears, and both had turned their faces. The discovery affected them as much as it had done the child, and the lady, too, stretched out her arms; and then, her face lighting up with joy, she ran down the steps.

"It's my mamma!" repeated Allan, almost dancing with joy.

Peach and Caleb were greatly relieved, and the latter sprang to the ground and assisted Allan down. A moment later and he was clasped in the lady's arms, while the gentleman came forward more moderately.

"My friend," he said to the coal-dealer, "it appears that we owe you a great debt of gratitude."

"Be you the boy's father?" asked Peach.

"No; but this lady is his mother."

"Well, I'm right glad to hear it. So it's here that she lives?"

"No; she lives a mile away; but when Allan was known to be missing she came here to ask my aid. The child wandered away—"

"He don't say so!"

"No?"

"Says he was kidnapped."

"Is it possible?"

"Pears like it."

"That is strange—but come inside, and let us hear your story. Our thanks are in order, and I do not think you will find us ungrateful."

"I guess not; but it ain't me who deserves the gratitude or can tell the fullest story. Here's a young man, Caleb Cinders by name, who has done it all, and who—"

"Draw'r it mild, Mr. Peach," suggested the Castaway.

"Don't you dispute me, Cinders!" retorted Peach, shaking his whip at Caleb in mock menace. "I don't allow any person to dodge credit for his good deeds. Sir,—to the stranger—'I'm in a hurry an' hate ter stop; an' this lad can tell you all I know and more.'"

"Then we will excuse you, my dear sir."

And so it came about that Peach mounted to his seat and drove away, while all the others entered the house. Allan had recovered his usual spirits, but clung fast to his mother, and she, as soon as she could think of anything except the boy, showered the Castaway with grateful thanks.

The gentleman, however, while he showed sincere relief, looked at the practical side of the question.

Cinders was given a seat in a fairly-furnished parlor; and he accepted the situation as philosophically as though he had been in Horace Peach's coal-shed.

"Now, young man," said the stranger, "we will first of all, introduce ourselves. This lady is Mrs. Claribel Garland, Allan's mother; and I am Alton Norway, a family friend."

"Mamma likes him real well!" put in Allan, with the embarrassing frankness of children.

Mrs. Garland blushed; Norway smiled, glanced at the comely widow, and continued:

"Now, Allan, tell us how you were lost."

The boy made the statement in detail. He had been allowed to go out on the porch of his mother's house, and, when an Italian came along with a hand-organ and a monkey, he had followed to the corner. There he had been seized by two men, placed in a cab, driven away, taken to Proctorham's and locked up in the stable. The men had been rough men, with beards, which was all the description he could give of them.

Caleb was then called upon for his story, which he gave in plain terms, but without any effort or intention of making himself a hero.

He won Mrs. Garland's hearty thanks, which was very pleasant, as she was a charming lady who, obviously, had not seen more than twenty-five years of life. Alton Norway was, perhaps, three years her senior. Norway meditated deeply for awhile, and then broke forth with the sudden question:

"Caleb, what do you think of Proctorham's conduct in this matter?"

"He acted mean as p'ison!" Cinders declared.

"Do you suppose he thought a mere child like Allan to be a thief?"

"He was a crank ef he did."

"It seems suspicious to me."

"Me, too!"

"In what way?"

"I can't see," declared the Castaway, "why total strangers should lock him up in the stable, unless Proctorham told 'em to."

Norway turned to Mrs. Garland.

"Do you hear that, Claribel?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that this affair is very strange. Why should Allan be abducted? You are not wealthy, and no large ransom could be expected. You will remember that, a few months ago, there was a circumstance which, I told you at the time, was an attempt to get your child away.

Now, another, bolder effort has been made. What was the object?"

Norway spoke gravely, solemnly, and Mrs. Garland changed color and trembled perceptibly.

"What do you think?" she asked, faintly.

"You remember the mystery in your own life?"

"Yes."

"I think you will do well to let me investigate it, now."

"Surely, you don't think—"

"I cannot help thinking that this bold outrage of to-day is very suspicious. As long as you stayed away from New York, all was well; as soon as you returned, the circumstances changed. I may be wildly imaginative, but I cannot help thinking that the same powers that darkened your own youthful days are again at work. Moreover, I suspect this Irving Proctorham. Consider how absurd it would be for the kidnappers to lock Allan up there unless Proctorham was in the plot!"

"He shall not get my child again!" cried Mrs. Garland, whose mind ran in a parental, rather than an analytical channel.

"I think that the charge of robbery was a sudden thought of Proctorham's, to get an excuse to get Allan again in his clutches!" Norway added.

"Shouldn't be a tall s'prised," agreed Cinders, with a nod. "The way the gent broke out was amazin', an' I hev thought all along thar was a loose screw."

While they talked Norway had heard the door-bell ring, but had paid no attention to the fact. At this juncture, however, there was a knock at the parlor-door, and a servant appeared, a troubled look on her face.

"If you please, sir, there's a gentleman—"

She was pushed aside, and a man abruptly entered the room. He paused and swept a glance around, and Allan uttered a cry of terror and clung tightly to his mother.

Caleb Cinders started up in surprise which was not unmixed with trepidation. The unceremonious intruder was Proctorham!

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVIL GENIUS CLAIMS THE BOYS.

THERE was a brief, ominous silence. Proctorham looked angry and ugly, as much as though he intended to crush every one present. If he had taken a careful look around the room, he might have read in certain faces there, it is possible, that he would not have everything all his own way.

He did not wait. He leveled one finger toward Allan, and vehemently addressed Allan's mother.

"Woman, put that child down!" he exclaimed. "You do not know the viper you are befriending. He is a precocious and dangerous thief!"

Mrs. Garland turned very pale and had no voice to speak, but Alton Norway took two long steps and reached Proctorham's side.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, in an intense voice, "how dare you intrude in my house like a rioter?"

Proctorham quickly removed his hat.

"I beg your pardon, sir, if I have been too abrupt," he answered, with a good show of politeness. "I meant no harm, but my feelings carried me away. Allow me to say that you do not—cannot know the two boys whom I see here. They are old, cunning thieves!"

"Have they stolen from you?"

"Yes."

"What have they taken?"

"A watch which I left in a vest, hung up in my stable."

"Do you mean to say that yonder child, who is scarcely more than an infant, is a thief?"

Norway's voice rung out indignantly, but Proctorham retained his mask of politeness.

"He is much older than he looks, and has had a long schooling in crime by one of the old pickpockets in New York. My dear sir, I do not blame you for being deceived; his appearance is very deceptive. You do not know his history as I do, or you would not have taken him into your house. His father died a death of violence; his mother is even now serving time in Sing Sing as a thief and an ally of burglars who did murder!"

The boldness and directness of this charge almost took Caleb Cinders' breath away, but it had the very opposite effect upon Mrs. Garland.

She ceased to cower back and tremble for Allan—she arose with the boy in her arms, and, confronting Proctorham with the dauntless front of an old-time heroine, and the indignation

tion of a slandered woman, retorted in a clear and ringing voice:

"Sir, I am the boy's mother!"

As quick as the lightning's flash did Irving Proctorham's manner change, and the change was as radical as that made by a cyclone. One moment he was erect, bold, confident and impressive; the next he was a dumfounded, speechless craven.

Mrs. Garland's declaration appeared to take him wholly by surprise. He started back as though he had received a blow; his eyes dilated with alarm; his belligerent hands fell nerveless by his side; his color began to come and go fitfully; and, in every way, he betrayed the deepest surprise and consternation.

Caleb Cinders felt like dancing a jig. It flashed upon that astute youth that his ex-employer had "put his foot into" it in the worst way.

Unquestionably he had not suspected that Allan had found refuge with his own relatives, and this made it look as though he had known where the Garlands lived, and had thus been betrayed into a fatal error.

He had not imagined that the mother would be in a house a mile from her own home.

After a little while he began to recover his wits, to try to hide his dismay and command his voice, but he stammered and talked at random when he spoke.

"Are you—did you—did I understand you to say—to say you were his mother?"

"I am his mother!" coldly replied Mrs. Garland.

"And you, scoundrel, have made yourself liable to prosecution for libel by saying that she was a convict in Sing Sing!" sternly added Norway.

Proctorham pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his perspiring brow.

"There is a mistake—a great mistake!" he protested, feverishly.

"You are right, sir!" Norway retorted.

"It's a different boy."

"Indeed!"

"A case of mistaken identity."

"When did the mistake begin?"

"When I saw him on my premises, and thought that he was a boy named Tom Huse."

"Perhaps you can explain how he came to be locked in your stable?"

"That is very mysterious."

"Is it so to you?"

"Certainly—of course. The boy Caleb told me about it, but I did not credit it then. Locked in my stable, was he? Odd, decidedly!"

Proctorham was beginning to recover his coolness, and he was acting very well the part which, clearly, he must assume to get out of his fix.

Norway was not deceived. He understood a good deal and suspected more, and felt sure that the visitor was a scoundrel who had overreached himself. If he had acted on impulse Norway would have accused him, and driven him from the house, but the young man was shrewd, as well as clear-sighted, and having an object upon which to turn the suspicions of an old case, he was disposed to go carefully on and reveal nothing.

If there was ground for his suspicion, the best way was to let Proctorham think they were deceived.

"There must be some explanation of the fact," guardedly answered Norway, to the last remarks.

"I remember that Caleb said the child was locked in the loft. Possibly the guilty persons thought we would not go there, ourselves."

"You may be right."

"That is undoubtedly it," Proctorham declared, with the air of a man who had solved a mystery. "I will inquire if suspicious persons have been seen around my premises, and report the result. This, however, does not excuse me for my violent conduct here. Madam, I am deeply ashamed!"

He had turned to Mrs. Garland, but she had lost her voice once more. Norway warned her with a gesture, and answered for her:

"Mistakes will occur, sir."

"But I was positively brutal."

"We must allow something for impulse."

"You see, I followed the coal-cart, and, learning that it stopped here, and believing that this poor child was Tom Huse, the thief, I made a blunder for which I am ashamed—shocked! I dare not ask forgiveness, but I do regret it deeply."

This speaker was preparing an easy way out, and Norway accommodated him. To assure him that he was freely, fully forgiven would be to overdo the matter, and betray the deception;

so Norway adopted a middle course and politely, but rather coldly, assured him that no one could be expected always to be right.

And so, after a good deal of talk, and another apology, Irving Proctorham got out of the house as a skillful and cunning man can, even when he feels upset.

Norway saw him off, and then returned to the parlor.

"Oh! why did you let him go?" Mrs. Garland demanded, holding fast to her child.

"I could not detain him, Claribel."

"He spoke falsely; I know he did. Even when he was apologizing, he looked at Allan in a way which made me shiver!"

"There was a lurkin' devil in his eyes!"

This verdict came from Caleb Cinders. The Castaway had been very willing to let others do the talking, and had kept well back—so far back that, he correctly believed, Proctorham had actually forgotten him, in the trepidation and dismay of his blunder.

The visitor had gone without a parting reference to Caleb, and it was simply because he did not think of him.

"You agree with me?" cried Mrs. Garland.

"I do, mum!" Cinders asserted.

"And so do I," added Norway. "It was because I thought as you do that I used him so well. We could not have him arrested, certainly; and it was well to blind his eyes to the truth."

"Them's the figger!" the Castaway exclaimed. "I ketch on ter your scheme, an' I must say it's the proper caper. Goin' ter fool him, ain't ye?"

"I wish to hide the fact from him that I see through his pretensions and hypocrisy."

"Do it, mister; do it! I'm clean down on him sence the way he cut up."

"And you, my boy, are out of work, are you not?"

"Figgertively speakin', I'm a castaway; but I shall flop up ter the surface like a whale fur breath. I can't be downed jest 'cause he's showed me the door."

"You have lost your place by protecting my child, and I will see that you don't want!" declared Mrs. Garland, earnestly.

"I echo that statement," added Norway. "You have done nobly, and we should be most ungrateful to overlook the service."

"Oh, that wa'n't nothin'," Cinders cheerfully asserted. "I kin see how yer feel, but what else could I do? Was I goin' ter see a small infant abused by mean skunks? Wal, I should say *not*!"

"Your modesty is to your credit, but we shall insist upon helping you. Some proper situation shall be obtained for you."

"Ef it'll be an accommodation ter you I presoom I'll take it, though I'm used ter lookin' out fur Cinders, myself."

"We'll speak of it later. And now, Claribel, what about the mystery in your own life?"

CHAPTER V.

WHO WAS SHE?

MRS. GARLAND'S expression became grave.

"What about that mystery?" she asked, replying to Norway.

"I have pointed out that, I believe, wisely or foolishly, as the result may show, that I suspect your recent troubles spring from the old ones. While you were away all was well; since you came to New York, however, two attempts have been made to kidnap Allan. A presentiment on my part that something would occur may influence my judgment; but I cannot but think all is off one piece."

Norway paused and glanced at Caleb Cinders.

"Want me ter adjourn?" asked the Castaway, good-humoredly.

"No," Norway replied, acting upon a sudden impulse. "I may need a shrewd boy like you yet, and your noble defense of Allan satisfies me that you are of good timber. I think we can rely upon you."

"Bet yer life! I sort o' like this crowd!"

Caleb looked around and nodded his approval several times in a highly humorous way.

The boy had strongly impressed Norway. Plain and ill-clad though he was, he had an honest, intelligent and genial face, and the young man believed that he had found a rough diamond in Proctorham's cast-off employee.

Norway was a man of discrimination and sound common sense. Born in a town of New York State he had come to the city at an early age, when the death of a relative there left him property which brought in an income sufficient to support him in a modest way.

Having no extravagant tastes, he was satis-

fied with the income, but not to live in idleness. He became a literary writer on a scale which would not be popular with, or pleasant to one of less substantial nature. He was a frequent visitor to the large libraries of Gotham, where he read books on substantial subjects, found delight in them, and shaped his literary career therefrom.

He may be termed a general writer on scientific and abstruse subjects.

Moreover, he had studied human nature as he found it in the metropolis of the New World, and had found nowhere a more interesting subject than in the boys of every-day life.

He had, therefore, a double object in making friends with Caleb, and his judgment told him that the Castaway was to be trusted.

"We thank you for your good words, young man," he answered, "and, if you continue in your way of thinking, you will find me ready to aid you."

The speaker turned to Mrs. Garland and continued:

"Let us speak of your early life, Claribel. Your first recollections are of a long railroad journey, at the end of which you were received by a man and his wife in Oxford county, Maine. They told you that you were thenceforth to regard them as your parents, and so call them, and you were kindly reared in their home. As you grew older you questioned them, and was told that, when they adopted you, it was from an orphan asylum in the City of New York."

"True," observed Mrs. Garland, with a sigh.

"They knew absolutely nothing about you further than this, not even the names of your parents. They had several times reported to the secretary of the asylum, and when you became old enough to think seriously, and to express yourself in words, you, also, wrote, and asked for information as to your parentage."

"Uselessly!"

"Yes. You were answered kindly, but your all-important inquiry was totally ignored. Twice, subsequently, you wrote again and asked the same questions: 'What was my early history? Who am I? Who were my parents?' Invariably, these questions were passed over in the reply; not a reference was made to them."

Caleb was growing interested in this history. Poor as he was, he seemed to be richer than Mrs. Garland—he had a name, and she had none. Practically, he had never had any parents, but she did not even know the names of hers.

He felt sympathy for her.

"Your last inquiry," pursued Norway, "was made six years ago, and, when that failed, you abandoned the attempt and resolved to give it no more thought. The latter determination became useless when you arrived in New York; you were on the scene of your early life—probably, in the city of your birth. You could not help thinking of it again."

"More than that," Mrs. Garland added, "I resolved to go in person to the rooms of the society, and make a final request. Several times I set a day, but I never had courage to go."

"Exactly. Now, I have never encouraged you, in the past, to pursue your investigation, for it was clear to me that there was something in the books of the society, in the record made when you were received, that was unpleasant, or so regarded by them. If your case had been of the ordinary kind, your inquiries would have been fully answered when they made reply to your letters."

"I realize that."

"Unless we infer that the society was the accomplice of knaves who were wronging you—and we will not do that until we are compelled to—we must believe that they were acting for what they thought your good."

"Then they make a great mistake!" declared Mrs. Garland. "They do not know what it is to be ignorant of one's parentage, and then have the information refused by the only persons who could give it."

"A man who deals with the public," answered Norway, with an air of disdain, "is not to be judged like other men. His blood is like ice; his heart like a stone; his head like a piece of machinery. Give the ordinary man an office, and he loses all human feelings. We boast of our country, and it is a grand one, but all our officials, from the intermediate class down to the doorkeepers, are useful to the public in a degree only because the public compels them to be—not from human feeling. I know them!"

This charge was not made with any evidence of ill-feeling, but was the result, pure and simple, of the speaker's contact with the persons he described.

During his business life he had met with a

good deal of discourtesy among petty office-holders, and his experience was not an isolated case.

"With all due respect for the judgment of the gentlemen whose books contain the records of thousands of unfortunate children, I think that they have no right to withhold information. I think the law would compel them to give it, and common decency certainly requires it. The record is there; what right have they to withhold it? In Heaven's name, who has a better right to the record than the person of whom it is an abridged history?"

"Thar is some mighty measly institutions dealin' in children, like it was hossflesh, in New York," observed Cinders, sagely.

"The high position of the society which figures in this case saves it from all such suspicion," Norway freely admitted. "It does a work really noble, caring for poor and homeless children, many of whom are orphans, and finding homes for them with good families. It is only when they say to an adult that his, or her, record is not to be revealed that they err. Of course the motive is all right, in one sense, for they assume that unpleasant things had better remain unknown, but they carry it too far."

"Suppose you go there," said Mrs. Garland, "and they refuse to show you the record?"

"I shall demand the right to see it."

"And what if they still refuse?"

"I shall consult a lawyer, to see just what our rights are."

"That's the figger!" Cinders exclaimed.

"And I am sure that, if it came to such an extreme point, a judge, with affidavits properly placed before him would give an order requiring the society to open its books to us."

"This frightens me!" declared Mrs. Garland, shivering.

"Be at ease, Claribel; I do not anticipate that we shall have to resort to such extreme measures, for I positively know that it is the custom of nearly all our institutions of like kind to allow any person to read the record, on application, when he or she has reached years of maturity, be the record good or bad."

"You'll fetch 'em!" was Caleb's expressed opinion.

"I shall certainly try, and, what is more, I shall investigate Mr. Irving Proctorham."

"I am afraid of that man!" exclaimed Mrs. Garland, clasping her child closer in her arms.

"Do not fear; we will take measures to protect Allan. My stout servant, Benajah Ames, shall at all times be near to guard him."

Some further conversation took place, and it was decided that Norway should set out to look up Mrs. Garland's past the next morning.

In the mean while it was thought prudent that she and Allan should remain at Norway's. With due care it did not seem that the child could be taken away, forcibly or otherwise. Besides two servants, there would be a faithful protector in Norway's aunt, Mrs. Lencourt, and the combined force ought to be enough.

Caleb Cinders did not object to staying in the house. He had not spoken idly when he said that he liked "the crowd" into which he had been cast by chance, and, as he was homeless, he was willing to put himself at Norway's disposal for the time.

He was shown to a good room and told to make himself at home, and, in a ready but modest way, he did so.

The night passed without any occurrence out of the ordinary channel, but when the family met at breakfast it was with the understanding that an eventful day was before its members.

CHAPTER VI.

A WOMAN WHO WANTS MONEY.

WHEN Norway was ready to start on his errand he asked Caleb if he would like to go, too. There did not seem to be any necessity for the Castaway to remain at the house, and Norway saw that, accustomed as the youth was to outdoor life, confinement was growing obnoxious to him.

Cinders caught at the chance, and made ready.

"I think that I need not caution you further," observed the master of the house to Mrs. Garland. "You will understand the necessity of keeping Allan in until I return."

"I do, indeed."

"And not let any bogus message deceive you. If Proctorham is really determined to get the boy, he may send word by some one pretending to come from me, and ask you to intrust Allan to the messenger. Do not do this under any condition."

"Rest assured, I will not allow myself to be deceived by any such trick."

"Then we are ready to go."

Despite this assertion Norway hesitated, and it was plain that he was not wholly at ease. Neither was Claribel Garland. A crisis was at hand in her own affairs, as well as in her child's, and, lacking the strong nerves which some women have, she was nervous and apprehensive.

What would the near future bring forth?

Norway finally aroused, spoke to Caleb, and they went out together. The Castaway at once experienced a feeling of exhilaration as he got in motion, but his companion was thoughtful and silent for some time. Then he threw off the mood and talked in the kind way which was so natural to him, questioning Cinders as to his past life, and showing marked interest in the account.

"He's about as good as they make 'em!" thought the Castaway, with great satisfaction. "Ef thar is ter be a fight, I'm with him fur the whole war!"

In due time they reached the charitable institution, the location of which need not be stated definitely, and the boy was left outside while Norway went in.

The latter saw two good-sized rooms which were connected by a double-door, and a young man sat at a desk in the further one.

He arose politely when the caller appeared, and the case was soon stated concisely to him. He had but one question to ask, and this was rather superfluous in view of the information already given. Was the object of inquiry now of mature years?

Being assured that she was, herself, a mother, he unhesitatingly took down a time-discolored book and opened it before the visitor's eyes.

Norway had become elated by such rapid progress, but he was doomed to disappointment. Sandwiched in between many other similar records was the brief entry which certified that Claribel Moer was received at a given date from the Department of Out-Door Poor, and sent to Maine, three days later.

After this was a record of each occasion she had written back to them, as she grew older, and nothing more.

Norway's face had become downcast.

"You see how it is," announced the representative of the society; "the child was really never in our keeping, and was with us in no shape over three days; so you will have to apply to the office of the Out-door Poor. It is at the corner of Third avenue and Eleventh street."

Norway was aware of that, but he disliked to give up the quest there. He had more confidence in the society than in the department to which his quest now took him.

He remained in conversation for some time, but finding no more was to be learned, went out and rejoined Caleb.

"I am going to Third avenue," he announced, "but not in the best of spirits. I have a feeling that I am going to meet with a discouraging experience. On the whole, I think that you need not accompany me there, for my movements are very uncertain. How would it suit you to go where you please during the forenoon, and meet me at my house at one o'clock?"

"A prime idee!" the Castaway agreed.

"Then take this dollar and amuse yourself as you see fit."

Cinders did not know whether to accept the money or not, but Norway overcame his hesitation by thrusting it into his hand, and then they separated.

The Castaway had no very clear idea of what he would do to occupy his time, so he wandered on aimlessly. One moment he thought that he would call upon his mother, but the notion was speedily discarded.

"Tain't goin' ter do until I kin carry a better report," he decided. "She's had worry enough over me, an' ef them amiable kids of her second husband's learn I'm out o' a job ag'in, wouldn't they jest howl with joy! Wal, they would be welcome, but I don't want to worry my poor old mother. She's stuck to me through thick an' thin, an' I wouldn't hev her think I'm a bad egg fur all o' Madison avenue as a bridal present ter me!"

Occupied with these thoughts Cinders strayed on until he was aroused to active life by a scene peculiarly one of the big city.

First of all he saw a number of children in the street, gathered at one side, and then he discovered that they were grouped around a collection of household goods.

The latter were arranged in a neat, compact row on the extreme edge of the sidewalk, and it needed no explanation to see that it was a case

of ejection. Somebody could not, or would not, pay rent, and the result was that he, or she, had been put out against her will, probably by process of law—put out against her will, for it was evident that the exiled tenant was a woman.

She was there in all her grief and desolation, a gray-haired, slovenly-looking person, who, sitting on the very top of her ejected goods as though it were her last earthly resting-place, wrung her hands and whimpered in a style which amused the grinning children around her.

Curiosity is ever active in the youthful breast, and Caleb Cinders went closer to see her.

He was the largest boy present, and the moment that the old woman saw him she broke out in eager words addressed to him.

"Little boy, won't you go to your mummer an' get me some money? I've been throwed out in a heartless way. Deary me, deary me! an' me so old an' good. Always kind an' helpful to others, an' now come to this!"

She wiped away her tears with her apron, whimpered some more, and, as the crowd increased, addressed its members collectively.

"Won't somebody get me some money? I'm good old Mother Beck, an' ev'ry one speaks well on me. Never hurted nobody, an' kind an' helpful to all; an' now I'm throwed out in my old age because I had no money to pay my rent. Deary me, deary me! it's hard lines for an honest old soul!"

"Honest!" retorted a scoffing voice from the crowd. "How long is it since you sailed under the alias of Mrs. Huldah Joy?"

"Who's a better right?" returned Mother Beck, her manner less amiable than before. "It's a poor person that can't have two names."

"It's a suspicious one that has to have two!"

"Go away, you trash! What is it to you? Huldah Joy was an honest woman—I'd be honest of my name was Smith. Deary me! I had money when my name was Huldah Joy! Yes, yes; I had rich friends, then!"

"What crime did you do for them?"

"Hey! What's that? Crime! Nobody ever dared ter say a word ag'in' me afore. The rich folks give me money because I was good an' helpless; yes, an' he'd do it ag'in ef I could see him!"

Mother Beck stopped her whimpering, and a cunning, peculiar gleam appeared in her eyes.

"Ho!" she added; "I'll bet that I know how ter get my rent paid!"

She gave a final dig at her eyes with the apron, blinked several times, grew cheerful, and, glancing around, fixed her gaze on Caleb Cinders.

"Little boy," she cried, "I'll give ye a dollar ter run an errand fur me!"

"Thank ye, mum, but I ain't in the biz," Cinders replied.

"I'll pay ye good money, good money."

"If you've got money, why didn't you pay your rent?" asked a skeptic in the crowd.

"I ain't got it now, but I'll git it. When I send the message, the money will come."

"Blackmail money?"

The gleam in Mother Beck's eyes became a blaze of anger, as it were, and she caught up a fire-poker which was near at hand and flung at the audacious speaker viciously.

"Liars!" she shrilly proclaimed; "all liars! You think it cunnin' to abuse the old woman, but she knows more than all of you! Deary me, deary me! it only brains was money!"

The melancholy fact that brains were not money set the old woman to whimpering again.

In the mean while a hansom cab had been coming through the street, and fast approaching the scene of Mother Beck's harangue. A crowd had been steadily gathering to hear the woman talk, and the hansom cab would soon find its progress checked.

Its occupants were a lady and a gentleman, both of middle age.

Once more Mother Beck addressed Caleb.

"Little boy, won't you go the errand fur me? Won't you go to the rich man? He will give you money, for he dassen't refuse. Ho! I'd tell what I know about the rich lady ef he did!"

The cunning sparkle reappeared in her eyes, but, just then, the hansom cab bore down upon the crowd, which piled rather roughly upon Mother Beck's goods to escape. The old woman turned angrily, but flushed with joy as she saw the occupants of the cab. One moment she looked doubtful; then she almost screamed:

"There they are! Give me money, or I will tell your secret!"

Caleb gazed with breathless interest; the man in the cab was Proctorham!

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF MOTHER BECK.

THE Castaway was spellbound, for events had come with a rush. In a vague way he had noticed the approach of the hansom cab, but had felt no interest in it until the old woman had her sudden attack of violence.

It had been a study to see Mother Beck's face. Her gaze had fallen upon the occupants of the vehicle by chance, and only as upon the cause of the disturbance, but her expression had changed like a flash.

Wonder succeeded anger, and doubt followed, but almost delirious joy came in the track of all others. Her bony hand shot out, one finger pointed straight at the hansom cab, and the words were flung forth with great excitement.

The uniformed ramrod—otherwise called a man—who occupied the lofty seat, and had the vast honor of being the driver, had been about to order the crowd to make way, but the words died away on his lips and he gazed in surprise as the wild words sounded from the pile of household goods.

Caleb had made no mistake. The man in the cab was Irving Proctorham, and he and the lady who kept him company mechanically turned their heads as their driver had done.

They saw a peculiar sight.

In her excitement Mother Beck scrambled to her feet, but not to plant them on the sidewalk. She stood on the pile of household goods, her hand still stretched out, and her wrinkled, unpleasant face working oddly as she towered above the crowd.

"Here I be!" she cried; "don't overlook me. You know me, an' I know you! I remember you well. Deary me, deary me!—it's a long while sence you come ter me, most respected madam, but Mother Beck don't forget. I did your work, an' I did it wal!"

She might have been a madwoman, but appearances did not indicate that Proctorham and his companion thought her to be such.

Caleb Cinders's gaze was riveted upon them, and he saw the richly-dressed lady change color and impulsively grasp her companion's arm, but Proctorham's expression became positively furious.

"Drive on!" he shouted, to the driver.

The latter gorgeous individual had allowed the reins to slacken, but he gathered them up tightly again.

"Make way!" he cried, swinging his whip toward the crowd.

"Don't ye do it!—don't ye dare ter do it!" shrilly warned Mother Beck.

Evidently the driver at least had no fears, and he was about to force his way through, but the old woman leaped from her perch with the agility of youth, elbowed the obstructing persons aside and reached the hansom cab.

She thrust her hideous face forward as a contortionist might, and the lady recoiled.

"Stand back, or I will order my man to drive over you!" Proctorham angrily exclaimed.

"Do it, if you dare; do it, an' all the world shall know what I can tell. Velvet-faced lady"—here her voice changed to a whine—"you remember me, don't you now, deary?"

She leered amiably, but the startled lady in the cab feverishly, yet faintly, replied:

"No, no; I don't know you; I never saw you before!"

"No?" cried Mother Beck, the violent side of her nature showing again. "Well, I think I kin make myself understood! I think I kin tell—"

Caleb Cinders saw Proctorham's lips move, and felt sure that something was said for the old woman's private ear; then that gentleman spoke in a voice audible to all:

"Far be it from me to refuse the claims of worthy sufferers. What, my good soul, did you say was the trouble?"

"I'm fired out o' my home," Beck meekly answered.

"Infamous! What was the reason?"

"I had no money ter pay the rent, yer Honor."

"And such things really occur in our great, wealth-teeming city! Melancholy fact! Worthy woman, what do you owe for rent?"

"Twenty dollars, sir; bless your kind soul!"

"Here's your money, with enough left over to pay some one for carrying your goods back. I will bring your case before the city authorities, and see what can be done for you."

"Bless you, sir!" mumbled Mother Beck, as she gathered in several crisp bills.

Once more Proctorham's lips moved as he made a low-voiced speech, inaudible to the

crowd; and then he turned his head to the driver.

"Go on!" he ordered, peremptorily.

Mother Beck drew back; the Jehu in buttons cracked his whip; the crowd made way, and the hansom cab rolled down the street.

Caleb Cinders could not answer for any one else; but he knew that the latter part of the scene had been a fraud in which Proctorham and old Mother Beck were equally anxious to act a part.

He had not had any charitable impulse until he was frightened into it, and the old woman had been belligerent enough until his first low-spoken words had made such a sudden change in her manner. The plain English of it was that she had demanded hush-money and got it.

"Guess Proctorham has been up ter mean capers afore!" thought the Castaway.

Mother Beck chuckled as she watched the carriage roll away.

"The ol' woman ain't dead yit!" she affirmed, for the benefit of the crowd. "Ho! perhaps I shall leave my pretty room, my dear room; an' then, ag'in, perhaps I sha'n't! Ha! I'll have my goods an' chattels back in there within an hour!"

"Don't that money burn your fingers?" asked a scoffer.

The old woman stopped short.

"What! what!" she exclaimed. "Why should it burn my fingers?"

"Ain't it blackmail?"

"False! false!—all lies!" shrilly declared Mother Beck, as she shook her fist at the speaker. "The poor, dear lady was once sick with small-pox, an' I nursed her through, an' she was grateful!"

This gauze-like explanation produced a general smile, for she had never been known to help any one, but as there was no scoffing reply, she trotted briskly away to arrange, it was believed, for the return of her goods to the old room.

"Sort of a tough, ain't she?" asked Caleb, of a boy near him.

"Reg'lar screamer!"

"Know her wal?"

"All I want ter."

"Know the folks in the harnsome cab?"

"No."

"She bled him."

"You bet she did!"

"What fur, d'ye think?"

"Don' know."

Plainly, nothing was to be learned in that quarter, but Cinders was not discouraged. He felt an interest in old Mother Beck, and wanted to know more about her. If there was to be a fight between Norway and Mrs. Garland on one side, and Irving Proctorham on the other, it would be a very excellent thing to get a clew to another misdemeanor in which Irving was concerned.

The Castaway next tried a woman.

"So Mother Beck will be with ye longer, eh?"

"Yes—more's the pity!"

"Ain't she a good neighbor?"

"Is a burglar a good neighbor?"

"D'ye mean she's a burglar?"

"Don't ask me!" and the woman shook her head solemnly.

"I'd sorter like ter know."

"You had better not. 'Tain't fur children ter know, and I can't tell ye! She's lived here a long time, an' I never knowed any good on her. She was a woman who dranked a good deal, but never worked, an' had plenty o' money at all times."

"Where'd she get it?"

"She had it; don't ask me where she got it. A good fifteen year she's lived here, always well-fixed; always drinkin' an' never workin'. Ef she hadn't dranked we'd never 'a' known what ter think; but when she did drink she talked, an' she let out that she'd done a job for rich folks, sometimes, an' was livin' on what they had paid her."

"That's odd!" commented Caleb.

"Odd? Guess ye don't know rich folks. Why, ef the real life o' the rich was made open, New York would be so in the soup that ev'ry parson here would sell his diplomer fur a mess o' potash, like him in the Bible, an' go ter Afrikay ter be a missionary an' eat cannibawls—he eat by them cannibawls, I mean!"

"Yes; but about Mother Beck?"

"Oh! yes. Wal, about two months ago her way o' life changed, an' we wa'n't long in seein' that she was, at last, short o' cash. She went out ev'ry day, but not ter work."

"What fur, then?" Cinders asked.

"Ter tramp the streets an' look—look—look! Look fur what? Lord knows, I don't; but

she'd go on the streets where the big-bugs live, an' peer inter the face of ev'ry one she seen in a carriage, or on foot, an' inter the winders o' the houses."

"That's funny!"

"No; her money had give out, an' she was lookin' for the ones who had give it, so as ter strike them again. That's my notion. An' she went out day after day, day after day, for weeks an' months, always huntin' her game."

"Did she find it?" inquired the Castaway.

"Not unless it was just now," and, with this significant remark, the woman turned and entered the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT THE RECORD CONTAINED.

AFTER leaving Caleb Cinders, as before described, Alton Norway went at once to the office of the Superintendent of Outdoor Poor.

The building is at the corner of Third avenue and Eleventh street, and is one of the least pretentious of the many in which the city business of New York is done.

Norway had never been there before, but he discovered that the entrance was on Eleventh street, and promptly entered. Once inside, he saw a scene so novel to him that he mechanically paused.

He was in a large, slightly-oblong room, where a good deal of business was being done. One end, and a portion of each side at the connecting points, was rendered private by means of a sort of counter, surmounted with a wicker-work iron fence, the whole being not unlike that seen in the sacred precincts of a bank.

In one corner a man sat engaged upon a book, or set of books, but, as he was all alone, Norway decided that he was merely the bookkeeper. Behind another part of the "fence," and near the door, was a man who was talking with a ragged person through a pigeon-hole, and behind the ragged person was a line of other ragged persons.

It was a dismal line, for the stamp of Poverty was upon all. Some were men and some were women, but all looked to be poor and wretched. Some of them had an arm in a sling, and others had bandaged heads; and one woman had a baby in her arms.

It was an eloquent, but a sorrowful picture. These were the unfortunates for whom the Department was organized, and they were applying for aid from the city. Perhaps every one could have told a story pathetic or thrilling enough for the columns of the daily press, and one—the woman with the baby—brought Norway's errand eloquently to his mind.

So, probably, Mrs. Garland had once been left there.

The melancholy line was constantly reinforced by persons who came from the further side of the room, and there, Norway soon perceived, was the man with whom he must deal.

The space occupied by the Department extended beyond the large room, and the visitor saw a passage leading to an unknown region, with three or four steps to reach it, the ground floor of the remainder of the building being higher than that of the first room.

On one side of the passage was a small room which looked like an office, and between this office and the large room was an opening, waist-high, like a big window. By this opening sat the superintendent, busy with applicants.

Seeing that he must await his turn, Norway continued to use his eyes. He saw that when a person entered, he or she went first to the superintendent, where he was kept some time in conversation, and when the point was passed, went to join the melancholy line, where numerous questions were asked and the replies recorded.

The whole room was plain, old-fashioned and almost forbidding, and the close, unpleasant air and line of unfortunates had a depressing effect upon Norway. Never before had he seen such a collection of wretchedness, and he began to realize the condition of the poor of New York.

He wished, too, that the rich of the city would deign to take one look into that room.

As others passed on he drew nearer to the officer in charge. To reach him one had to ascend the three or four steps before mentioned, and then stand on a sort of broad stair with a wooden protection against a fall at his back, and a policeman at his left.

The particular policeman whom Norway saw was young, plump and good-looking.

Clearly, he was not a victim of poverty.

At last Norway stood on the broad stair with

the handsome policeman at his left and the superintendent before him.

He began the battle at once.

"I have called, sir, on important business which I will state as briefly as possible. Upwards of twenty years ago, among the many children this Department sent away to homes, was one, Claribel Moer, who was sent to Oxford county, Maine, to be adopted by worthy people there. This was done; a generation of time has passed; the child is now a woman, and she would like to ascertain what she does not yet know—who she is!"

The superintendent listened attentively, but did not offer any remark.

"Beyond the fact that her name, real or fictitious, was Claribel Moer, she knows nothing of her early life. When she went to Maine she was so young that she could tell nothing to her adopted parents, and all recollection of the old life soon died away. Knowing that your books must have her record she respectfully requests you to allow me, as her representative, to see and copy it."

"Can you give the exact date when she was sent to Maine?" briefly asked the impassive superintendent.

"It is all on this paper," Norway returned, as he handed over the article named.

"We will investigate. Take a seat!"

"Take a seat!" echoed the handsome policeman, as he pointed to a seat near the broad stair.

Norway "took a seat." He felt grateful that he was not asked to stand in the melancholy line.

The policeman was given the paper the visitor had brought, and with this he passed behind the iron fence to the man whom Norway had picked out as the bookkeeper. The document was left there. The bookkeeper—he may have been called a secretary, or any other lofty name; Norway never learned—took the paper and went to the Third avenue side of the room.

Rows of books, the records of the Department for many years, were there, and, after some search, he selected one, carried it to the desk and began to examine it.

The visitor watched him narrowly, being by that time in a state of nervous suspense. Hoping, as he did, to be more than a friend to Mrs. Garland, some day, her interests were his, but he had no selfish or unworthy motive.

Whatever the records might reveal, she still would be the woman he had selected for his wife, and she was not responsible for her early history.

After turning the leaves of the big book for some time the employee found the proper place, drew a sheet of paper closer to him, and began to write upon it.

Norway watched with fresh interest. How much was there to copy? How much would the record tell?

There was encouragement as the bookkeeper continued to write rapidly for some time; there must be considerable on the records.

At last the work was done; the big book was closed; the guardian thereof took the copy and started toward his chief. To reach him the subordinate had to pass Norway. The latter looked wishfully at the paper, and at its bearer, hoping that it would be handed to him, but, with an icy composure, the man passed on as though he had not seen the supplicant by the way.

The paper was received and examined by the superintendent, and then the plump policeman made a beckoning gesture and Norway went to the broad stair again and confronted the arbiter of his fate.

He was at once speared through and through by an attentive gaze.

"What relative are you of this lady?" asked the superintendent, touching the paper with his finger.

"I am an intimate friend; and," Norway frankly added, seeing that he must give good reasons, "I expect her to be my wife soon."

Perhaps the explanation had a marked effect, for the official at once assumed a very matter-of-fact, soothing air.

"Well, we are not able to give you much information, as the record is incomplete. She was received by us at the date you gave, and sent away almost at once. She was left with us by her mother."

"Was she permanently given up?" Norway eagerly asked.

"The mother never came back."

"What was the mother's name?"

"It was Huldah, and she was of Jewish parentage."

"And the father's name—"

"Is not given. Her name is down as Claribel Moer."

"Isn't that singular?" Norway asked, dubiously.

"Records were very incompletely made at that time."

"As some information was gleaned, it must be that applicants for aid were questioned then as they are now," and the young man indicated the melancholy line, the members of which were going to the pigeon-hole one after another to be put through the mill of interrogation. "Such being the case, why did the officials of that day ascertain that the mother was named Huldah, and that she was of Jewish parentage, and yet learn no more?"

"It was owing to a loose system."

"And the mother's surname is not given?"

"No."

"Or the date of the child's birth?"

"No."

"And there is no clew to the father's identity?"

"There is not. Our city departments were not then so attentive to technicalities—by which I mean the points peculiar to their business."

Norway experienced a sense of resentment that the superintendent should feel it necessary to act as a dictionary, but passed over the cause of offense.

"Will you allow me to see the paper?" indicating that which contained the copy of the record.

"I have told you all there is."

The superintendent stirred in his seat as though the interview was at an end; the plump policeman stirred as though the subject had, in his opinion, reached an end of necessity, if not of justice.

Norway, alone, was irresolute.

CHAPTER IX.

CALEB CALLS FOR A HALT.

CONFLICTING emotions beset Norway. He felt sure that he had not been given all the information which the records contained, but he was uncertain how to proceed. What were his rights in the case? He did not know, and this placed him at a disadvantage. He certainly had a moral right to all that was there; if he had been sure that he had a legal right, he would have demanded to see the record.

As he was not sure, he thought it best to adopt a moderate course and not arouse any prejudice against his cause.

He asked some further questions, but gained no light.

Others were waiting to see the superintendent, and, as it dawned upon him that he was blocking the wheels of the city government, he passed slowly by the plump policeman, down the steps, by the melancholy line of poverty-stricken applicants, and out of the building.

The fresh air was a great and welcome change from the stifling atmosphere of the room he had just left; it reinvigorated his body, but there was nothing to exhilarate his mind.

He had failed in his quest, and the failure was annoying—he was next to positive that something had been kept back. It was not hard to surmise why this had been done.

What was known about Mrs. Garland's early life—or, at least, what was told by the record—was not favorable; and it had been thought best to keep all such unfavorable information secret.

Norway, however, was not ready to admit defeat.

"I will go further!" he thought, resolutely; "I will apply to the Commissioners of Charity and Corrections. They are the head of the Department, and I may be able to convince them that every person has a moral right to what is known about herself."

Small events often prove irritating, and so had the superintendent's manner. The latter had not been curt, harsh or ungentlemanly, but had adopted a course such as one would use to soothe and pacify a child. It had produced the opposite effect upon Norway, and the fact that the superintendent had thought it necessary to explain a simple word was not flattering to the young man's mind.

He was not in a cheerful frame of mind, either, when he reached home.

Caleb Cinders was there ahead of him, and nothing had occurred to disturb the household. Allan was safe, and his mother was contented.

Norway told his story in the presence of Mrs. Garland and Caleb.

"We are not defeated," he said, in conclu-

sion, trying to dispel the grave look on Claribel's face. "I feel sure that there is something in the records, and we will have it if such a thing is possible. First of all, I shall consult a lawyer who is a personal friend of mine. He is himself employed in one of the city departments, and, consequently, would not care to take charge of a hostile campaign; but he will tell me what the law allows you."

"Is it best to go further?" Mrs. Garland asked.

"Why not?"

"I am afraid of the result."

"Ordinarily, I would not urge you, but, in view of the suspicions which Irving Proctorham has put into my mind, I really think we had better persevere."

"We will do so, then."

"We must know what is in the record. It is absurd to suppose that if your mother brought you to that place they would ask her first name and her nativity, and not learn the last name or her husband's name."

"I did not catch her name."

"Huldah."

"What's that?"

The question, quick and excited, came from Caleb. He had been waiting patiently and silently to tell Norway of his new encounter with Proctorham. Like Mrs. Garland he had failed to understand the name at first, but it now produced a marked effect upon him, as the question showed.

Norway turned in some surprise.

"Huldah was the name."

"Twa'n't Huldah Joy?"

"The last name was not given. Why? Do you know a Huldah Joy?"

"Heard the name ter-day; I did, b'jinks! It was a false name fur a sartain Mother Beck, a woman who was paid fur a secret, an' has been trampin' the streets ter find her banker ag'in; an' she has jest got some money out o' Proctorham!"

"I don't understand."

"Nor me!"

"I mean that I don't understand what you are endeavoring to convey. Explain!"

"So I will, short order, fur I think it's p'ison suspicious!"

And then Cinders rapidly told the story of old Mother Beck, giving a very clear account of how he found that woman expelled from her room to the sidewalk, and how she had made a raise from Irving Proctorham.

He did not forget to tell how, according to a neighbor, Mother Beck had lived for years on the proceeds of a secret.

"And this old woman was once called Huldah Joy?" thoughtfully replied Norway.

"Yes."

"There are probably a good many 'Huldahs' in New York," observed Mrs. Garland.

"The name is not common."

"If you think Proctorham was the evil genius o' this lady's early life, an' there was a Huldah in it, I presoom it might not be lost time ter look arter this Huldah who so skeered Proctorham that she got money out on him!"

This terse presentment of the case by Caleb could not, but be impressive, and Norway quickly replied:

"We will look to Mother Beck."

"Better do it right off."

"We will have lunch and go immediately."

"Surely such a woman as Caleb describes her to be cannot be my mother—at least, I think not!" Mrs. Garland hesitatingly observed.

"Decidedly not; but you will see that there is more to it, if anything. By following Caleb's course of reasoning we are, perhaps, rushing to wild conclusions, but if it should prove that she was the Huldah who carried you to the charity department, and that Irving Proctorham had an interest in the case, we can see at once that she was not your mother, though she may so have represented herself."

This statement greatly encouraged Mrs. Garland, and she was decidedly hopeful when they went to lunch.

When the meal was finished Norway and Caleb went to the Elevated Road and took a down-town train.

The former felt that they were doing a good deal of haphazard guessing, and that it might end in total disappointment; and the consciousness rendered him silent and thoughtful. Cinders was not taken that way. Having the impetuous spirits of youth, he was confident that they were going to run the mystery to earth at once.

Being at ease mentally the Castaway devoted his time to using his eyes, and managed to see about all that was going on in, and outside, the car. The latter had only a very few occu-

pants, and he regarded them with mechanical curiosity.

It was thus that he chanced to see an interesting pantomime.

On one of the cross-seats sat an elderly lady who was richly but modestly dressed. She had in her possession a small hand-bag which she had put beside her on the unoccupied half of the seat. She was deep in meditation.

Back of her, on the long seat, was a young man whose arm rested on the back of the short seat. Cinders was first led to notice him by the fact that he was regarding the lady closely; and then the Castaway discovered a peculiar fact. The young man carried a hand-bag precisely like the lady's, and, while keeping a very innocent look on his face, was slowly and cautiously lowering it into the seat which she occupied.

Caleb was on the alert at once; he would not have been a true, wide-awake city boy if he had not become suspicious.

Lower sunk the hand-bag without being noticed by the lady. When it reached the seat the man released his hold and as cautiously grasped the lady's hand-bag; then his arm began to rise, holding the ill-gotten property.

Cinders sprung to his feet.

"Stop, thief!" he cried, hurrying forward.

CHAPTER X.

A MISSING WOMAN.

THE words were of a nature to create excitement on any occasion, and they did so now. Every gaze became fixed upon Caleb Cinders as his clear command "Stop thief!" rung out in the car. The interest did not die out when the Castaway paused in front of the stranger, leveled an accusing finger at him and indignantly added:

"You give that lady's property back, you measly critter, you!"

The purloined hand-bag was in the stranger's lap, and he tried to look innocent.

"Are you drunk or crazy?" he demanded.

"I'm sober enough an' sane enough fur you!" coolly declared Cinders. "Give that hand-bag back!"

"This is my hand-bag."

"Not much, it ain't; it's the lady's."

The lady, after the first natural start, had shown commendable calmness, and she quietly observed:

"My hand-bag is here."

She pointed as she spoke, but Caleb's answer was ready.

"Look inside it, an' see! I say that his light-fingered nibs has swapped one on ter you jest like it."

The lady changed color and made a clutch at the hand-bag, but the stranger fairly bristled with anger and assumed indignation.

"What do you mean by such an infamous charge?" he demanded. "I have a good mind to smash you. Do you know who I am?"

"No; I ain't acquainted at Sing Sing!" Cinders retorted.

The stranger flashed a glance toward the lady and saw that she was opening the hand bag.

"There may have been a mistake," he admitted, with a trace of frustration. "My hand-bag was on the same seat, and I may have taken the wrong one—"

"Gammon!"

As the Castaway made this terse interruption the lady succeeded in opening the bag.

"This is not mine!" she cried.

"Tol' ye so!"

The lady sprung to her feet.

"I have valuable papers, and they are lost!" she exclaimed.

"Not ef we head off this p'ison pilferer!"

The thief was evidently an old hand, and he kept his composure remarkably. Now that the alarm was given he could not get away with the plunder, and he knew it. The next best way was to use his wits and get out of it. Alton Norway and the only other adult male passenger were at hand, and only great good luck could save him from being turned over to the police.

He raised his hat politely.

"Madam, it is quite possible that I have taken the wrong bag, though I assure you that it was a mistake. You will notice that they are much alike. Allow me to examine the one you hold, and if it proves that I have accidentally exchanged, I shall be as glad as you to make it right."

"That won't save ye from the Tombs, mister!"

So spoke Caleb, readily, and the thief turned upon him in a rage.

"I'll smash you—"

"Excuse me, but you will do nothing of the kind!" sternly put in Norway. "This lad is with me, and under my protection."

"Then teach him civility."

"Judging by appearances, he needs no teacher. He has done himself great credit."

"Gentlemen, let us settle this without useless talk," requested the lady, quietly. "I find that this second bag is mine, and in good condition. I do not claim the second; if this—this person does, he has only to take it and go."

"You won't let the critter off, will ye?" cried Caleb.

"Yes."

"He ought to be arrested," urged Norway.

"I decline to appear against him in court."

"You only do me justice, madam!" affirmed the thief, "and— But excuse me, here is my station!"

He was afraid that she would be induced to change her mind, and, as they slowed up, he was one of the first at the gate. Silence reigned in the car, but all mechanically watched him leave the train. When their way was resumed, the last chance of arresting him vanished.

"I'm afraid it's a mistake," mechanically remarked Norway.

"So 'tis, b'jinks!" Cinders agreed.

"I am sorry if I have disappointed you, and it is quite possible that I am wrong, but I have a horror of appearing in court. No doubt the man was a villain, but, as he did not accomplish his purpose, I preferred to let him go. That he failed is due wholly to this bright-faced young man."

She looked at Caleb Cinders, noted his appearance more closely, and then added:

"I am about to leave the train, but I would like to talk, at some future time, with him who has saved me from the loss of important papers. My lad, will you call upon me, a few days later?"

"I shall be pleased ter," the Castaway replied.

"Then take this card; it has my name and address upon it. When you come I will reward you properly for your very valuable service, which I am not able to do now on account of want of money."

"Don't mention it!" the boy quickly requested.

"I will mention it later."

The train was slackening, and, with a gracious smile, the lady passed out of the car and alighted.

"Charmin' as a queen!" Caleb commented.

"An estimable lady, no doubt," Norway agreed. "What does the card say?"

"Mrs. Catherine Richardson, No. — Lexington Avenue," Cinders read. "Sounds tony, don't it?"

Norway's mind was too busily occupied to dwell long upon the subject, and, as their own station was at hand, all the chief actors in the late scene were soon gone. It had not created much notice, for conversation had not been loud, and the trainmen had not discovered that anything requiring their attention was in progress.

Leaving the train and the station, Norway and Caleb walked briskly to Mother Beck's residence. All was quiet there, and the household goods had disappeared from the sidewalk.

They knocked at the door, but received no answer, and, as there was no bell, or other means of summoning any one, they entered.

After pounding on several doors they aroused a slipshod-looking woman.

"Where is Mrs. Beck's room?" Norway asked.

"Her room is up-stairs, but she ain't there," was the reply.

"No? Where is she?"

"Gone!"

"Gone?"

"Bag an' baggage. A truck came an' hour ago, an' she has left for good."

"Wa'n't her goods brought in, after they had been put out?" the Castaway demanded.

"No. She came back, an' said she wouldn't live here, nohow, so off she went to a new home."

"Where is that?"

"Don't know; we asked her, but she wouldn't tell."

Both Norway and Cinders were downcast. Had Mother Beck really slipped out of their hands?

"Didn't she tell any one here?"

"Not she. We see her get money of a fine gent in a hansom cab, an' we suspect he had her move off som'ers on purpose."

A sudden idea came to Caleb Cinders. When, after the adventure with Proctorham, she had

made off with the assertion that she would make arrangements to get her room back, and move her goods in again, she had gone in the same direction previously taken by the hansom cab.

Was it possible that Proctorham had again seen her, and had her move elsewhere on purpose to have her disappear?

She had used her tongue freely, and might be dangerous to him.

"Did you know the man who moved her goods?" continued Norway.

"No."

"But can't you suggest any way by which we can get trace of her? She must have friends—"

"I doubt it! She never had company, an' ef you can find any friend o' hers here, I'll go treat. Mother Beck was a neighbor we can part with just as well as not!"

"Did ye ever hear her called by any other name?" asked Cinders.

"No."

"Somebody called her Huldah Joy, when she was settin' on her property in the street."

The woman shook her head.

"Never heard the name. But, laws! old Mother Beck wouldn't be above havin' a dozen names; I always kept my spoons hid when she was around!"

This evidence of good feeling in the tenement house did not bring a smile to the face of either visitor. The old woman's disappearance was a severe disappointment. They had formed great hopes, and believed that money would lead her to talk freely, but she had vanished just when discoveries seemed to be in order.

As there was no reply, their informant suddenly broke out with fresh information.

"I wouldn't like ter have Mother Beck's conscience, nohow. Long years she lived here, doin' nothin', but havin' plenty of money; an' we all understood it was the fruit of some ugly deed. She run short, though, an' then she was wild. She'd lost sight o' her rich money-giver—so we think—an' she set out ter find him. For weeks she did nothin' but tramp the streets in the fash'nable quarter, an' look fur him, but she never found him. I'm glad she had ter get out!"

The speaker gave her head a jerk, shut her mouth, and stood on record as religiously opposed to old Mother Beck.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLOW OF A CLUB.

FURTHER questioning failed to develop anything of interest, so Norway and Caleb Cinders left the house.

"Where now?" the latter asked.

"Our one hope seems to be in finding the man who took Mother Beck's goods away. According to what we have been told, this was done, not in a furniture-van or express-wagon, but in a truck. We must visit every possible place around here."

"Them's the idea!" Caleb agreed.

"Away we go, then. We'll interview the first policeman we meet, and ascertain what stables are near."

"We'll run the old lady down!" cried the Castaway, confidently.

"I hope so."

"Of course we will. Never say die!"

This was good advice, but Cinders's sanguine spirits were destined to receive a severe shock. They acted upon the plan marked out, and made all possible inquiries, but not a man could they find who had moved an old woman's household effects that day. They visited stables and stopped teams, but all to no effect.

The right man had disappeared as completely as Mother Beck herself, and they could only conclude that, wishing to blind her trail, she had stopped some strange driver and thus accomplished her object.

By the time that their useless labors were concluded the afternoon had worn away, and they saw that they would have to let the missing woman rest for awhile.

Norway looked at his watch.

"I have just about time enough to catch my lawyer friend, who is employed by the city," he observed, "and as I want to learn just what my rights are in investigating Mrs. Garland's early life, I think I will call upon him at once. You can go on home and meet me there later."

"All right," Caleb agreed.

"You can say that I will soon be home."

"I'll do it."

They separated, and the Castaway took a train of the Elevated Railroad for up-town. On the way he got to thinking of his unceremonious departure from Irving Proctorham's house. He had left there his whole worldly possessions,

and, though his connection with Norway bade fair to soon make him better off than ever before, he did not like the idea of abandoning anything on his late employer's premises.

The desire to take his effects away became a passion, and he resolved to go there at once.

It was not likely that Proctorham would dare to do anything against him, and, in any case, Cinders did not hold him in awe.

In order to reach the house he had to pass Horace Peach's coal-yard, and, although it was past six o'clock, he knew that his friend would be there; so he concluded to call on him first of all.

He had not miscalculated; Peach was there, poring over his accounts, and his face was as striped as a zebra's where he had meditatively drawn his fingers across it and left coal-dust in bars.

"Hullo, Tom Thumb!" he cried, "be you still alive?"

"See any evidence that I'm defunct?"

"No; but I s'posed old Proc had you before now."

"He will go fur big game first, an' you are handy, ye know."

"If he comes around here," declared the coal-dealer, "I'll sprinkle him, an' then roll him in that dust!"

And he pointed to a black heap of powdered coal.

"I'd like ter see it done, b'jinks! It's owin' ter him that I'm a castaway right in the heart o' New York. I had a promisin' career ahead ov me as a boy-o'-all-work, but he nipped it in the bud, an' come nigh nippin' me, too. He ain't been 'round, has he?"

"Not aay!"

"He owes me up'ards o' sixty cents in wages."

"Sue him!" cried Mr. Peach, forcibly.

"Draw the money right out o' him! Hang Proctorham! He's no good, an' he comes o' bad blood!"

"Say," exclaimed Cinders, "d'ye know his folks?"

"Not intimately."

"I never hev seen anybody but his own family 'round his premises—no relatives, I mean."

"He's got a sister; a Mrs. Lydeckton."

"Where does she live?"

"I don't know."

"How did Proctorham get his money?"

"His father, Burr Proctorham, was rich, an' I s'pose it come from him. The old man was rich, miserly an' cranky, an' there was no great good will between him an' his son."

"Was there other heirs besides him an' his sister?"

"Never heard of any. Why?"

"I'd like to look inter his affairs."

"There's an old man down on Bondstreet who worked for the Proctorhams years ago, an' I reckon he knowsthem all like a book. His name is Ben Brown, and he lives near the Bowery. I don't know the number, but everybody around there knows old Ben."

"I'll call on him."

"If there's a secret in the fam'ly he can tell it. So you ain't going back to Proc's?"

"I'm going fur my clothes an' things," and then Caleb explained the errand which had taken him to the vicinity.

Peach shook his head and opposed the idea. Darkness was falling, and, at that hour, he did not think it prudent for the boy to venture on Proctorham's premises alone; and he did not want to go with him, for, if the rich man saw fit to be ugly, he could kill Mr. Peach's trade in that vicinity. As for going there, he might not touch Caleb, but it was taking a risk without any good cause, the coal-dealer thought.

The discussion lasted for some time, and, when Peach had carried his point and the Castaway had promised not to go that night, anyhow, darkness had fully fallen.

Peach arose and put away his account-book.

"Let's go home, Cinders," he suggested, yawning. "I ain't had any supper, and there won't be no more customers, ter-night."

"I thought I heard a footstep."

"Fancy, prob'ly, though it may be them Crooks boys are prowlin' around ag'in. They're the bother o' my life!"

The boys mentioned were mischievous young fellows who were always playing tricks upon everybody, and the possibility that they were prowling around caused Peach to step quickly to the door of the shanty.

Caleb was following more moderately, but something made him stop short.

As the coal-dealer reached the threshold there was the sound of a blow, and then he fell across the aperture and lay without sound or motion.

The Castaway paused and looked in wonder. He had seen nothing, and only the sound which had preceded the fall remained as a guide. What had it been? What had caused it? What was the matter with Horace Peach?

The boy stared at the darkness with a momentary feeling of alarm. Was there an enemy outside? Nobody likes to deal with a secret foe. If one was at hand, what was his purpose?

Caleb looked around for a weapon, but the single light was burning low, and he did not discover any.

He took a forward step, and again paused in doubt. The black expanse without was not inviting. He could not leave Peach uncared for, and he again made a forward move. Reaching his motionless friend, he seized his legs and began to pull him back.

The act hastened the catastrophe which had been impending.

Two dark forms suddenly whisked into view, revealing the presence of as many men; and then they sprung over the coal-dealer's body.

Cinders leaped backward, but he was speedily shown that he was not to escape so easily. Straight for him the men made, and he saw that one held some kind of club or sand-bag in his hand.

"Do the little hound up!" one of them cried.

There was no room in the shanty for running, so Caleb adopted the only course open to him. Lowering his head, he made a sudden dive to pass them. One tried to seize him and failed, but the other was more fortunate. Down came the weapon he held; the boy experienced a sharp pain in his head, and then he lost consciousness.

How long this condition of affairs lasted he never knew, but it could not have been a great while. He recovered his senses, and with their return came perfect clearness of mind. He remembered the last scene at once, and began to struggle.

It was a vain attempt; he found himself held down by some power stronger than himself. He was in utter darkness, and all appeared correspondingly silent, but the stillness was suddenly broken.

"Is all ready?" asked a voice.

"Yes," some one replied.

"Then let us get out."

"Are you sure the boy is fast?"

"Yes."

"The dickens would be to pay if he escaped."

"Never fear; he's safe as pie. It seems rough to make the old coal-dealer go under, too, just to fix the boy—but there ain't any help for it. Come on."

Footsteps sounded—a door closed—there was a little rattling outside—then all was still.

Suddenly, however, the darkness began to grow less. Caleb looked and saw a steadily-increasing tongue of fire, and its light revealed a pile of fine wood.

The truth flashed upon him.

He had been securely bound by the unknown intruders, and now they had set fire to the shanty and beat a retreat.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CASTAWAY'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

As he fully realized his peril, Caleb Cinders experienced a feeling of horror. Death by fire is certainly something to appall the stoutest heart, and that was what menaced him. He struggled fiercely, but the result only went to show how firmly he had been bound. He could not call for help because of the bandage which had been passed over his mouth, and, if it had been out of his way, he might not have made himself heard in the coal-yard, with the shanty door closed.

The blaze increased, lapping the light kindling-wood greedily, and the interior of the shed became as light as though a lamp was burning. It revealed, too, Horace Peach's motionless form. Caleb would have thought him dead, but the ropes upon his arms and legs showed that others had not thought so.

Caleb writhed like a tiger in battle, as he tried to burst his bonds. Unless Providence directed some gaze early to the place, the remote shanty was likely to be one mass of seething flame before help came.

For it to come at that hour would be no advantage or benefit to Cinders.

His career would be ended.

The fire gained with startling rapidity, though it was not a whirlwind-like spread of flame. It was as brisk as it was dangerous, and would have absolute control.

He called to Peach, but there was no reply.

"B'jinks! I've got ter depend on my own ef-

forts, an' I don't see as I'm wal fixed fur the battle. Couldn't be no more helpless ef I was a toothless baby. Say, Cinders, you'll be 'cast away' fur good an' all ef you don't look out!"

Despite the fact that he fully realized his danger, the boy remained clear-headed in his peril, and looked eagerly for a way out of it. What could he do? He had tested the cords which bound him, and found that they were not to be broken.

What other way was open to him?

He was lying on top of the big desk, and this, as he well knew, was fastened to the wall. Probably his enemies had tried it and found it secure before binding him to it.

This was not encouraging, but he could see no hope except to force it away from its position. If this could be done he could, perhaps, reach and open the door.

He began to work on this plan, and squirmed around until, after much labor, he got his feet against the wall. Not much time was left for him to work in; the fire had spread beyond the kindling-wood, and was taking hold of the shanty. This was old and dry, and when fairly in the grasp of the flames would burn up in furious haste.

Already the room was full of smoke, and he began to choke and cough.

A good chance was given him to put out his strength and press the desk away from the wall, but as the resistance all came upon the cords which bound him, it was at the expense of physical pain. This he did not heed—ignoring the pain, he pushed with all his might.

Not long had he been at it before there was a gratifying response. The desk began to shake, and there was a creaking sound which told that the nails, or screws, were giving way slightly.

With the smoke curling around him, and the red light growing stronger, he held grimly, courageously to his task, and one end of the desk moved clear of the wall.

Collecting all his strength, he gave a final great push.

There was sound of rending wood, and then the desk fell forward and toppled over on its side. This meant a good deal to Caleb Cinders, for he was in such a position that he was afraid the fall would actually break his neck. It did not have this effect, but he went down with a shock which almost stunned him.

He struggled afresh, however, and then followed an unexpected discovery.

He had done more than to break the desk away—the fall had caused his bonds to slip over one end of the desk, and they now hung loosely upon his limbs. Hope sprung to the front, and he hastened to get clear of them altogether. He could then reach his pocket-knife, and he drew it and began to slash away at the cords.

It was not long before he leaped to his feet, free from all impediments.

The way of escape was at last open, but he did not turn to the door. Instead, he ran to the sink and turned on the water. He was determined to fight the fire, and subdue it if such a thing was possible.

It took a long time, it seemed, for the pail to fill, but he stood gasping and coughing until it was done. Then he repeated it with a second pail, and began to shower the flames.

It was a hard, brave fight that followed. Any one less resolute would have despaired, but not Caleb Cinders.

Just as he saw that victory was in his grasp, a faint voice arose, and he discovered that Horace Peach was conscious. It was a short task to release him, and then the coal-dealer gave his aid.

Before long the last vestige of fire was gone, and the weak, blackened amateur firemen grasped hands in congratulation. When the flames were raging, Cinders had not dared open the door, knowing that the breeze would fan the fire; but it was now done, and the fresh air was very welcome to both.

They stood in silence for some time, enjoying it.

"Wal, this beats me!" Peach finally observed.

"Strikes me we've beat it!" Caleb replied.

"We! I ain't had much hand in it; you've did it all. Cinders!" and here the coal-dealer seized the boy's hand, "I'm proud of you; I am, by sixty! You hev done work that stamps you a hero. I'm as grateful as you please because you saved my life, but that ain't much compared to the glory you've spread all over yer-self!"

"That's not glory, but coal-dust!" facetiously returned the Castaway, as he rubbed off some of the black smut.

"Never mind; you'll be President, yit!"

"Drawr it mild, Mr. Peach. I kin see through you—you want ter be my Secretary o' State, but your politics may not be sound, an' I won't promise. But this ain't ter the p'int. Who did this job?"

"Mean scoundrels!"

"I believe you."

"D'ye know, Caleb, I hev an idea 'twas you they come ter do up?"

"I know it was. I heerd them talk, an' one said it was pretty rough ter kill you jest because I must be put out o' the way."

"That settles it. But who set them on?"

Cinders shook his head.

"You say?"

Peach pointed toward Proctorham's house.

"I don't reckon you want to go there alone, after dark, ter get your clothes, now!"

It was asking a good deal of common sense to believe that a man like Irving Proctorham was the instigator of a murderous deed, or that he would find it to his purpose to use such desperate means to get rid of one so young and poverty-stricken as Caleb Cinders, but what else could be inferred?

Some one had tried to do the work: who else would have any wish to wipe the boy's name out of the list of living persons?

"You've got to be careful now, my lad," gravely added Peach.

"That's about so."

"If I was you, I'd stay in-doors."

"Wal, I ain't a-goin' ter!" the Castaway declared, stoutly. "I won't make no hermit o' myself, jest ter please them who hate me. I'm goin' ter be all the livelier. I'm little, but that's only all the more reason why I must be right on my muskle. Hide? Not much! On t'other hand, I'm goin' ter run them chaps down an' see them inside a prison-cell, b'jinks!"

For some time longer the two talked on the subject, and then, when all had been said, and their faces and hands well washed, they separated. Peach decided to stay there over night, to watch his property, so Caleb started alone for Alton Norway's.

He kept his eyes wide open as he went, determined not to fall into any new snare. It was not a pleasant feeling to know that secret enemies were endeavoring to take his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEN BROWN'S FAMILY NOTES.

CALEB reached Norway's house in safety, and encountered that gentleman at the door. He had expected to find him at home and wondering why his young ally did not come, so the surprise was mutual.

They went in and found Mrs. Garland in a very uneasy state of mind. Their prolonged absence had led her to fear that some harm had come to them.

"I can easily explain my tardiness," observed Norway, "and I presume that our young friend can do the same."

"Rather!" the Castaway grimly replied.

"Have you had more adventures?" asked Mrs. Garland, anxiously.

"Not at all, but I have been trying to get light in dark places. When I left you, Caleb, I went at once to see my lawyer friend. He said that his long legal experience as what may be termed a specialist had injured his knowledge of general law, but he was of the opinion that we could properly demand and get all the information in the Department's books. Of course it could be refused us, but our recourse would be, in such a case, to a judge, before whom we could lay our claims in the shape of affidavits."

"That looks favorable," Cinders commented.

"But we do not want to go to law."

"I'm afeerd you will have ter."

"It is not improbable. When I left my legal friend I went at once to the house of one of the Commissioners. I found him a very pleasant gentleman to talk with, and have an appointment to meet him at his office to-morrow, at half-past ten."

"Then he is going to let you see the books?" exclaimed Mrs. Garland, eagerly.

"I don't know," Norway doubtfully replied.

"He said that he would first look at the record himself and then decide."

"I bet ag'in' you!" declared Caleb, with a nod.

"You may be right; I confess that I am not over-confident. As well as I was used, there was much in the Commissioner's manner to discourage me. He said that in his opinion it was often best to keep unpleasant facts from those who had gone out from their Department under such circumstances."

"Can the truth be worse," asked Mrs. Gar-

land, quickly, "than what my fears will suggest, if our request is refused?"

"Just the question I asked, but it made no impression."

"Putting other possibilities aside, I shall believe, in case of a refusal, that one of my parents was a great criminal. Can the truth be any worse than this suspicion? Is not the truth always better than suspense?"

Her tremulous voice and her nervously-waving hands showed how deeply she was agitated, and Norway declared that the truth should be known if it was within the range of possibility.

"If necessary, we will go to law!" he declared.

"I've got a new racket," observed Caleb.

"What is it?"

"Man down on Bond street who used ter work for the Proctorhams years ago, an' must know their hist'ry wal. Been advised ter see him!"

On being questioned, he gave full particulars, as far as he knew them, and it was decided that the ex-servant should be seen the next day.

Last of all the Castaway told of his narrow escape from death by fire, and a genuine sensation followed. Both Norway and Mrs. Garland leaped to the conclusion that the attempt on his life grew out of the recent events, and each mind found the finger of suspicion pointing to Irving Proctorham.

The subject was discussed in all its bearings, and then the household retired for the night.

Caleb Cinders was weary, and he slept as only young persons can. If unpleasant dreams haunted his rest, he did not remember them in the morning; he awoke feeling refreshed, and ready for more adventures.

He found Mrs. Garland cheerful, and Norway in a determined mood.

The latter had found that Caleb was a person to be trusted with any delicate mission, and when the Castaway asked permission to investigate the Bond street clew, while Norway went to call on the Commissioner, his ally unhesitatingly agreed to the plan.

At the proper hour they started down-town.

They separated at Eighth street, for it was there that Norway left the Elevated Railroad train, but Cinders rode to Houston, and then walked back to Bond street.

Peach had described the Bond street party as an old man named Ben Brown, who lived near the Bowery at an unknown number, but who was well known in that vicinity. The Castaway proved the latter statement true, for the first lounge of whom he inquired unhesitatingly pointed out the house where Brown lived.

Cinders was soon in that gentleman's room.

Brown proved to be a little, dried-up old man who spoke in a squeaky voice, and did not hesitate to talk freely.

"Know the Proctorhams?" he answered, when questioned. "Wal, I should say so! Worked for them, boy an' man, a good many year. Old Daniel Proctorham was alive when I went there, though his son, Burr, was then fifty years old. Daniel died, and so did Burr, finally, an' then come Irving, Burr's son. Three generations, an' I knowed 'em all. Yes, yes!"

"How many children did Burr have?"

"Three lived ter grow up. There was Irving an' his sister—her name's Mrs. Lydeckton now—they live in New York. Then there's another son, Ethan Allen Proctorham, who's out in Californy."

"When did he go there?"

"Thirty year ago. He run away from home, Ethan did, after a quarrel with his father. He went ter Californy an' married there; an' he's got four sons an' three daughters, an' four children has died. The sons is named Ethan, Richard, John an' Waldo, an' the girls is Amy, Mary an' Martha."

Ben Brown certainly appeared to have the family history at his tongue's end.

"Where was them children born?" Caleb asked.

"In Californy."

"How old was their dad when he left here?"

"He run away right arter his seventeenth birthday."

"An' went right to Californy?"

"Yes."

"Ain't he never been back here?"

"No."

Here was a disappointment for Caleb. As soon as he heard of Ethan A. Proctorham he had begun to build hopes upon him, but this information was decidedly against his theories. He hesitated, and Ben Brown went on, glibly:

"Ethan was a fine boy; the best of all the Proctorhams. His father was mean, an' miserly, an' cranky; an' Irving was even meaner. Ethan couldn't stan' the gang, an' he jest ups an' run away. Ginerally, boys who run away make a big blunder, but he got out o' bad company."

"Did he get his share o' his father's money?"

Ben chuckled.

"Guess you didn't know Burr Proctorham?"

"No, I didn't."

"He didn't have no money."

"But Irving is rich."

"He ain't got so much as folks think, an' what he's got come other ways. Burr was s'posed ter be rich, an' he did have a few thousand dollars, but not any great pile. He was a miser, an' saved some, but he was the poorest business-man you ever seen. No; he never had much money. Irving's goods an' chattels come from his mother's side o' the house."

"Who was she?"

"A Beckwith. She come of a good fam'ly an' was a fine woman. I never knowed her fam'ly, though, but they was New Yorkers."

"Wa'n't there any other heirs?"

"Irving Proctorham must 'a' been the nearest, for he got the money."

"I'd like ter know more about the Beckwiths."

"I can't tell ye, but Irving's mother had a relative—mebbe a niece, though I don't think she was so near—who could tell ye all about the Beckwiths. Her name is Mrs. Catherine Richardson."

"Who?" cried Caleb.

"Mrs. Catherine Richardson."

The Castaway drew a card from his pocket. It was that given him by the lady on the Elevated Road, whom he had saved from being the victim of a thief, and he believed that he remembered the name.

He now looked at the inscription on the card.

"Mrs. Catherine Richardson, No.—, Lexington Avenue!"

If this was a coincidence, it was remarkable.

"Whereabouts does she live?" he asked.

"Up-town, som'er's—on Madison or Lexington avenue, I s'pect."

Caleb asked several more questions, but soon satisfied himself that Ben Brown had told all that would be of interest, so he arose to go. Just then the loquacious old man bestirred himself and inquired why his visitor wished to know all this.

The reply he received did not reveal anything, and, hurrying out, Cinders was soon on the Elevated Road again, and bound up-town.

His destination was Mrs. Richardson's house.

"Whether she's the same one or not it's worth tryin'," the Castaway thought; "an' I'm goin' straight to her. Jemimal wouldn't it be jolly ef I've struck the trail, an' kin have sech a kind old lady ter help me!"

Youth is sanguine, and, cool as Caleb usually was, he began to get in a fever.

Reaching the house, he rung the bell.

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH A REVOLVER UPON HIS KNEE.

CALEB CINDERS was a natural admirer of charming things, and he was duly impressed when, in response to his ring, one of the neatest, most rosy-cheeked and pleasant servant-girls imaginable appeared at the door.

He removed his hat with a graceful sweep.

"Mrs. Richardson in, mum?" he asked.

"No, she isn't, sir," replied the pretty girl, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Is she out fur long?"

"Well, for some hours, for she left word that she would not be home to lunch."

"That's bad!"

"Do you want to see her on business?"

"I did, that. D'ye know where she went?"

"No."

"Say, has she relatives named Proctorham?"

The pretty girl grimaced.

"No. I've heard her mention them—one of her relatives married into the family—but she won't own any relationship. She don't like them!"

"Shows her good sense. Is Mr. Richardson in the house?"

"Why! he's been dead ten years!"

"Oh! scuse me. Any children?"

"No. Are you the census-taker?"

The pretty girl spoke with a spice of sarcasm, but Cinders coolly replied:

"I be, mum."

"You look like it!"

"Blood will tell!"

The Castaway lifted his hat again, and stirred up his luxuriant hair with four plump fingers.

"Wish I knowed where Mrs. Richardson has gone!" he added, wishfully.

"Perhaps I can tell," remarked a new voice, and another servant appeared at the door. "Just before she went she wrote on a card. She meant to take it with her, for after she got into her carriage she observed to me: 'I've forgotten my card, but it don't matter!' Here's the card now."

She had taken a bit of pasteboard from the table and now extended it to the Castaway. Several words were scribbled in pencil upon it, and he read as follows:

"Mrs. Beck, No.— Greenwich avenue."

Caleb looked up in surprise.

"Who is Mrs. Beck?"

"Don't know."

"Ever hear of her afore?"

"No."

Cinders had—at least, the resemblance between the name and that of "Mother Beck" struck him very forcibly. Could it be that the old woman had removed to Greenwich avenue, and was the same whom Mrs. Richardson had gone to see?

He stood studying the card until the pretty girl became impatient.

"Well, are you 'in' for thirty days?" she asked, pertly.

"No; they let me off easy fur turnin' State's evidence ag'in' you!" retorted Caleb, as he handed back the card. Then he raised his hat again—there was a tremendous fund of politeness in our Castaway—and bowed low as he added: "Ladies, I hev the honor ter wish ye good-day! May yer shadders never grow less!"

Then he walked down the stoop and away from the house.

"I'll be chewed up, individually an' collectively, ef I know what ter think o' this!" he muttered. "Gone ter see Mrs. Beck, has she? Who's Mrs. Beck? Is she my charmin' frien' who set on her household goods, or ain't she? Anyhow, Mrs. Richardson is the Mrs. R. I wanted fur ter find, an' it strikes me as odd that she's gone ter see Mrs. Beck. Wal, b'jinks, I'm goin' ter do the same! Wish I had a vehicle—harnsome cab or coop—fur I'm gittin' ter be a perdiduous trav'ler."

Not having the coveted vehicle he had to rely on the means open to him. Norway's liberality had given him plenty of pocket-money, and this helped him along so well that, after using two cars, he finally found himself at the corner of Eighth avenue and Fourteenth street.

He trudged along toward Greenwich avenue, which is but a few rods below. Jackson Square was clad in its brightest green, and several children were enjoying themselves in that little oasis of city life, but parks and recreation had no charms for the persevering investigator then.

It was not many minutes' walk to the number which he had found on the card.

The house, like nearly all on the dingy avenue, was of plain brick, and had seen its best days long before Caleb Cinders saw his first day of life.

There are some houses in every city that seem to have the character of their occupants spread upon the very building-stones, good or bad; but others are of that rusty medium which gives no clew, and they may shelter saints or sinners.

Such was the case with the Greenwich avenue house.

No stylish carriage stood at the door, and Caleb concluded that he was not to see Mrs. Richardson, but he hardly had expected that he would; it was the magic of the name "Beck" that had brought him there.

After using his eyes for awhile, he walked forward and pulled at the door-bell.

A small boy with a distorted face soon answered the summons.

"Mrs. Beck in?" briskly asked the Castaway.

"Yes."

"Tell her a gentleman wants fur ter see her."

"Come in!"

The boy was as mechanical as a machine, and there was no cause to suspect that he had an emotion of his own. If the calmness was genuine, his stoical air would indicate that Caleb might have asked for a lady-bug, or the Queen of England, without causing him surprise.

Caleb entered, and the boy closed the door. Then he turned his face toward the stairs.

"Come up!" he briefly directed.

"Has Mrs. Beck lived here long?" asked Cinders.

The reply was not intelligible.

"Hey?" questioned the visitor.

The taciturn boy muttered something out of which Caleb distinguished the words "last night." Whether they applied to Mrs. Beck he could not tell, but they cheered him somewhat.

By this time the second floor was reached, and, as he turned around the balusters, the Castaway had view of the hall-room at the further end. There stood an aged woman, and he felt a thrill of delight as he saw that it was, indeed, Mother Beck herself.

He was about to utter her name when the guide pushed open another door.

"In there," he tersely directed.

It was a large, rather cheerful room, and Caleb walked in without delay.

"Sit down!—come pretty soon."

With this encouraging statement the boy of few words closed the door, shutting himself out, and the adventurous Castaway was alone.

He was in high spirits over his success in running down Mother Beck, but he assumed a dignified air and sat down like a substantial citizen. Until he had seen the object of his quest, he had not dared to believe, really, that the two Becks were one, but now that he was on the scene, he began to ask himself how he was to deal with her.

What questions was he to ask?

Really, he had no proof that she knew anything about the case which interested him so much, and as Proctorham had spirited her away, it was to be presumed that she was under the influence of that evil genius and his money.

Would she be likely to divulge her secrets freely to a person as young as her present visitor?

Caleb was still wrestling dubiously with this conundrum when the door again opened and some one entered. It was not Mother Beck, but a man, and the boy felt a thrill of uneasiness as he recognized the fellow who had tried to rob Mrs. Richardson on the train.

The man sat down deliberately.

"You've dropped in, I see," he observed.

"Yes," Cinders admitted.

"What do you want?"

"I want to see Mrs. Beck."

"I represent her. State your business!"

The speaker's manner was cold and calm—as cold as ice—and there was a gleam in his eyes which the youth did not like.

"I had rather see Mrs. Beck," was the reply.

"You can't see her."

Curtly making this announcement, the man drew a revolver and laid it upon one of his knees.

"You have got to deal with me!" he significantly added.

"Do you talk with guns?" uneasily asked Cinders.

"When I run up against such a meddling sneak as you, I do! I'm on to you, you cur! You're the fellow who tried to get me arrested on the Elevated Road."

Caleb was alarmed, but his apprehension was not of a craven sort.

"Didn't you deserve it?" he retorted.

"No matter; you beat me out in a job I was anxious to do. When you stood eying this house, a few minutes ago, I saw you, in return, by chance, as I looked down through the blinds. When you rung the bell, I at once told the boy to admit you—otherwise you would not have got in—and here you are! How do you like it?"

"The person I want to see," Caleb distinctly announced, "is Mrs. Beck—"

"You won't see her! You will deal with me, and don't you think that I will fail to deal with you! I've heard of folks being trapped, before now, but you have walked in on your own accord. Now you're here, you will stay. If you try to go out, this 'barker' will stop you!"

He raised the revolver and deliberately cocked it.

CHAPTER XV.

FRESH DISAPPOINTMENT.

WHEN Alton Norway set out for the office of the Commissioners of Charities and Correction he went very well clothed. The fact that the superintendent had thought it necessary to turn to a human dictionary, and explain his words according to dictionary methods, still rankled in Norway's mind, and he hoped that it would not be repeated.

Although he had been dressed as a well-to-do New Yorker generally was during business hours, he thought it best to show the officials that if, as appeared to be the case, they had so

long dealt with the poorer classes that they did not expect any applicant to understand ordinary English, and mistook all for the more ignorant ones, he, at least, was able to wear good clothes.

There was no unworthy motive in this resolution; it was partly because his pride had been hurt before, and partly because he knew that good clothes did have distinct influence; but he went with a tall hat and a cane.

He saw the influence of these before he had been long occupied in his work.

Reaching the building, he entered promptly. The scene he had before witnessed was being repeated. There was the same melancholy line of ill, broken-limbed, maimed, ragged and suffering unfortunates at the station of both the superintendent and the subordinate officer.

"Heaven pity them!" he thought.

It was a gratifying feeling to believe that their wants would be duly regarded by the proper officials, and he proceeded to banish them temporarily from his mind.

As he could see no other possible place he decided that the Commissioners' office must be somewhere beyond the passage he had seen on his previous visit, and he marched in that direction without a word to any one.

As he ascended the short line of steps and passed the pile of applicants he saw the plump policeman look at him doubtfully, but he did not pause. In the passage he encountered a young man who seemed to be a clerk, or book-keeper of some sort, and he asked for the office of the Commissioner at whose dwelling he had called.

"I have an appointment with him," he added.

"The visitors' entrance is by the other door"

—indicating a second passage, where Norway saw a dozen men standing around—"but," continued the young man, regarding Norway's tall hat, "you can go in here."

He indicated a door near his elbow, and then himself opened it.

Norway was thankful for the favor. Was it due to the appointment mentioned, or to the tall hat? He never knew.

Entering the sacred region beyond he found himself in a room which, for an office, was of good size. It had a decided air of business, and seemed to be the quarters of busy men. In the center stood a desk-table about ten feet long. Upon this were papers by the quantity, all showing more or less orderly arrangement.

Only two of the Commissioners were present. The President of the Board occupied a chair at the head of the table, and was conversing with a stranger on business. The Commissioner in whom Norway was especially interested was moving idly about.

Norway had only had time to take in the general aspect of the office when the other visitor departed by the second door.

Then Norway addressed the Commissioner.

"I presume, sir, that you remember my calling at your house?"

"I do. Sit down, sir!" was the business-like, but not ungracious direction; after which the speaker turned to the President of the Board. "This gentleman," he proceeded to explain, "has called upon me in regard to one of the children in the care of this Department many years ago, but now grown to womanhood. Acting for her, he wishes to make a copy of the record concerning her, as found on our books."

The president listened attentively, but said nothing.

"The lady in the case," pursued the last speaker, "is ignorant of her parentage, and of all facts relating to her early life, although she several times made inquiries in the past."

The president maintained a thoughtful silence.

"Let me have the name," added the Commissioner, "and I will see the superintendent."

Norway made a few remarks which he tried to make appropriate, and gave the gentleman a slip of paper on which was written Mrs. Garland's childhood's name and the date when she was sent by the Department to Maine.

The Commissioner hurried out and a new applicant was admitted by the second door to see the president. He was a young man who spoke English with a strong German accent. He stated that he was studying for the medical profession, and wished for additional facilities to see the workings of the hospitals of New York and the cases therein.

He received courteous attention, and was referred to a suitable person, with instructions to return if not successful.

He was bowed out just as the subordinate Commissioner entered.

"A man who wishes for medical knowledge,"

thought Norway, "is given careful attention. Now to see how these high city officials are impressed by the case of a lady who wishes to know who she is!"

The second Commissioner sat down at the table.

"Are you a relative of this lady, sir?" he asked.

"I hope to be her husband soon, sir," was the frank, but grave reply.

"Is this why you wish for a copy of the record?"

Norway understood the insinuation.

"The event I have mentioned, sir," he quickly replied, "will not be influenced by my investigation—it cannot be. My purpose is fixed."

"I judge that the lady occupies a good position in life?"

"She has enough of worldly goods, and is respected by all who know her."

"Do you think she would be happier to know the particulars of an unfavorable past?"

"I believe that where information has been so stoutly denied in the past, the most unfavorable facts cannot be worse than what one would naturally imagine under such circumstances."

"It is my opinion, and in this the superintendent agrees with me, that where a record is not pleasant, no good can be served by making it known. Of course we are willing and glad to make known all reasonable matters, but why divulge secrets which cannot but cause unhappiness to those concerned?"

The very air was full of an unfavorable decision to come, and Norway was correspondingly downcast.

He was earnestly regarding the grave president of the board, and, though that official showed a decided disposition to let his fellow-Commissioner settle a case he had begun, Norway was about to appeal to him when the subordinate darted a glance at his chief and briskly added:

"However, we are disposed to deal well with all, and this case shall have my earliest attention. To-day we are very busy; so busy that I cannot stop to examine the record. I must ask you to excuse me now, and leave your address, instead. I will look at the record, and write to you within a day or two."

Norway was dissatisfied; but what could he do? To insist upon seeing the record would not only turn the Commissioners against him, but, no doubt, he would be ejected promptly.

All he could do was to rely upon the promise he had received, and resort to threats when more harmonious measures had failed.

At the same time he had no faith in the promise; he believed that it was the intention to tire out the investigation and the investigators.

He spoke further, making as strong a plea as he could for his cause, and then left his name and address and took his departure.

The Commissioner saw him to the door.

"You shall hear from me in a day or two," he repeated; "I will use you as one gentleman should another."

And with this promise ringing in his ears Norway went out—out through the passage and the big room with its melancholy line, and out to the street again.

He did not go in a very agreeable mood.

"Delay follows delay!" he muttered. "Where will it end? I suppose that I must be patient, but I dislike to carry this news to Claribel!"

There was no help for it, and he went home and made his report. It was a sad disappointment to Mrs. Garland.

"I am the only person known to be living to whom the record relates, and it is refused me by those who have only the coldest blooded interest possible!" she exclaimed, bitterly.

"Remember the Commissioner's promise," replied Norway; but his own manner was dejected.

Caleb Cinders had not returned. They waited for him, hoping that he would bring good news, but he did not come.

Noon came, and still there was no sign of their young ally.

By that time Norway had grown anxious, remembering that one attempt had already been made on the boy's life, and he started for Bond street. There he learned that Caleb had come and gone, so he went home to wait again.

It was a long wait. The afternoon passed and evening came. Every effort to find him was a failure, and Norway had grown very much alarmed. He decided that if there was no change by morning, he would notify the police.

The night passed, and morning came, but Caleb did not return.

CHAPTER XVI.

DIRECT EVIDENCE AT LAST.

CALEB CINDERS looked into the muzzle of the leveled revolver with more composure than was to be expected.

"Say, ef you're goin' ter do any shootin', s'pose you give me one o' them?" he suggested.

"You will know it when I do!" his enemy replied.

"Ain't afeerd o' sech a little chap as me, be you?"

"Not a particle."

"Then get another shootin'-iron, an' le's fight a duel!"

The Castaway did not make the proposition with any idea that the man would agree to it, or because he really wanted to fight as indicated, but it was his nature never to be put down by adversity.

"You are to be shut up; that's the figure for you," announced the thief. "You have been doing a good deal of leg-work, lately, and it is time for you to pull up short. Your address for the next few weeks, or months—unless we decide to dump you into the North River—will be right here. We have a room well suited for a prison-place, and there you will stay!"

"I protest!" declared Cinders, stoutly.

"All right; do it!"

"Lemme out, or I'll hev the perleece after you."

"How'll you get to them?"

"I'll find a way."

"When found, make a note of it. I think I can hold you fast. Now I'll take you to your Elba, and let me say that you are not to cut up any tricks by the way. I don't bear you any good-will, and had just as soon nail you as not. If you try to run, or raise your bazoo, I will yank the trigger here. Are you 'on'?"

"D'ye reelly mean ter keep me here?"

"Yes."

"You'll be sorry!"

"That's my biz."

"Strikes me that I'm interested, too."

"You don't hold a vote."

"I may, later."

"If so, do me up all you can."

"Thank you, I will; an' don't ye forget it. Ef you keep me here ag'in' my will, you will see the liveliest circus around here, later, that ever showed on this globe, b'jinks!"

Caleb spoke boldly and indignantly, but did not succeed in making an impression upon his enemy. That person arose, opened a side-door, turned his revolver upon the boy and laconically commanded:

"Go in!"

There was no help for it, and Cinders went, slowly and sulkily enough. It proved that the room was what was known as a "dark" room—that is, it had no window which opened to the outside world, air being obtained by a transom. Light was almost wholly lacking, and Caleb could see nothing when he first entered.

All this was so obnoxious to him that, despite the revolver, he turned defiantly toward the door and his captor, but the latter was not in a mood of delay. He had stepped back, and the door was already closing.

It banged to, and the Castaway was alone.

He sat down in a chair, somewhat disconsolate, but as level-headed as ever.

"B'jinks! Here I am ag'in, high an' dry on a horstyle shore. Captervated, incusserated an' held ag'in' all law an' order. I desurve the name 'Castaway' now, ef ever, fur I'm tremenjously shipwrecked. Nobody won't ever find me here, an' I guess I'm in fur life."

He shook his head in a melancholy way which was mostly assumed.

He might feel dismayed enough later, but, just then, he was taking it in a serio-comic mood.

After awhile he arose and looked around the room. The only point which possibly could be termed weak was the transom. Caleb thought he could squeeze through that, but finding iron bars on the further side, decided that any weakness there was not very manifest.

Once more he sat down. He studied how to beat his enemies, but gained no idea.

In this way hours passed—how many, he had no means of telling, but he felt sure that evening must be at hand. Anyway, it was a long and wearisome wait. Finally a quantity of food was put in at the door. He tried to interview the feeder, but failed—he retreated promptly.

It was half an hour later than this that the prisoner heard voices. They were not from the room where he had talked with the man with the revolver, but on one side of his prison, there

had once been a door, which, later, had been boarded over and closed, but not cut off by any partition.

Such things, Caleb knew, were not uncommon, and he had known amiable women to listen at such points to learn their neighbors' business.

The Castaway now resolved to profit by experience given in the past—he went to the door and listened eagerly. Muffled voices came to his hearing, but the words were fairly distinct.

"I tell you that you've made a mistake!" declared an unseen speaker.

"What else could I do?" asked a second voice.

"The boy was dangerous."

"You did right to nab him—"

"Then why do you complain?"

"I refer to the woman. Great Scott! you will have the liveliest row afoot ever heard of. Such a woman as Mrs. Richardson cannot disappear without a general howl!"

"Let them howl!"

"Be sensible!"

"So I will, Proctorham. Well, to face the matter fully, they can't trace her here, for she dismissed her carriage at Tiffany's, sent the driver to get one of the horses shod, and came here by car. Nobody saw her enter that knows her."

"She may have told her driver she was coming here."

"From what I learned by skillfully questioning her, I think not."

"Or it may be known at her home."

"You are bound to look on the dark side, Proctorham."

"I'm bound to look out for my precious self. Mrs. Richardson is a woman who can wield a good deal of influence, and if she gets loose, now, you may as well check your trunk for Sing Sing. Are you sure she cannot get out of this house?"

"Dead sure!"

"Is she bound?"

"No; but her prison is secure."

"I must leave it to you to look to that, and to hang to both her and the boy. As for Caleb Cinders, make no bones with him!"

"What shall I do?"

"Can't you put him in a bag, and throw him into the North River?"

"It might be done, possibly."

"Then do it!"

The rattling of a chair followed the last words, footsteps were audible briefly, and then all became silent. The men had gone.

"Humph!" Cinders muttered. "So I'm ter be put in a bag an' throwed in the river! That's cheerful, b'jinks! Ain't heerd anything so consolatin' sence some time previous ter no time. But I ain't in yet, an', Proctorham, old chap, I'm onter you!"

Proctorham's hand did, indeed, show plainly in the case at last, and Caleb felt that, if he was clear of the house, he would be equipped for the fight better than ever.

But he was not clear.

He looked wishfully at the transom, and then drew the table to the locked door, mounted upon it, and tried the iron bars which shut him in.

They did not seem to be particularly strong, and the ends were buried in ordinary wood.

"Ef I had time I could cut my way out," he muttered, thinking of the sharp knife in his pocket.

After much meditation he put the table back where he had found it. To begin work at once would be reckless, for he might have visitors.

He sat down and endured another period of idle, painful waiting.

At last the house became perfectly silent, and the distant sound of a striking clock conveyed to him the fact that the hour of eleven had come. Then he put the table under the transom and began the task of cutting away the bars. A less sanguine spirit would have despaired, for, keen as his knife was, it was not of a size suitable to the work, and he had to labor in the darkness.

Caleb Cinders, however, was not one to be beaten without a struggle, and he began to cut at the wooden frame bravely.

Hour after hour the fight went on. His hands, hardened by toil though they were, grew blistered, and his legs and head ached, but he was making progress. Five bars had been in the way, and it required an hour and a half to get rid of the first, but the others came a little quicker.

Finally the last was removed, and just then he heard the clock strike four.

Day was fast approaching, and not much time remained for work.

He rested only a minute or two, and then made the attempt to crawl through the transom. This he accomplished after a good deal of wriggling, and finally stood on the other side.

He found himself in a room filled with rubbish of various kinds—boxes, boards, and odds and ends—but there was no window, and the only door was that which led to his late prison-room.

A ladder-like stairway led to the floor above, however, and he began the ascent promptly.

"Don't know what in p'ison I shall find," he thought, "but I'm in fur the war. Never say die!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINAL STRUGGLE.

THE Castaway's first view of the floor above was encouraging. He saw a window, with a faint light shining in, and the relief it gave him was great.

"B'jinks! that's the pootiest sight I've seen in an age. Cinders, old man, thar may yit be balm in Gillium fur you—Hullo!"

He had made a fresh discovery; he saw evidence of other light than that of nature. It was the dull gleam of gas through a space three feet long and eighteen inches high—clearly, another transom, with a cloth curtain.

Caleb had an idea, and he found a chair, placed it by the door, mounted upon it, pushed the curtain aside and looked through the transom. He saw a lighted room, and there sat Mrs. Catherine Richardson, wrapped in an unromantic bed-spread, keeping a solitary vigil.

His heart bounded with joy—he had found his companion prisoner.

But how was he to reach her? Of course the door was locked. He ran his hand down to find the knob, but touched a key, instead. It was in the lock!

His face flushed with joy, and, without stopping to form any plan, he quickly turned the key. Another moment and he had the door open, and had entered the room.

Mrs. Richardson started up with a startled air, but he made a quick, warning gesture.

"Don't speak above a whisper!" he cried, anxiously. "I've come ter rescue you, but ef them p'ison critters hear any sound, our name is Dennis!"

The lady was looking at him in bewilderment.

"Say, you remember me, don't ye?" he added.

"You seen me on the train, when the feller tried ter rob ye of the hand-bag."

"I do remember you," was the quick reply, "but why are you here?"

"Ter rescue you. Jest believe that, an' I'll help ye out in a jiffy. You're a pris'ner, ain't ye?"

"Yes."

"What fur?"

"It is the plot of an enemy named Irving Proctorham—at least, I think so."

"Why does he want you shut up?"

"I am trying to get facts which will deprive him of ill-gotten money."

"Say, tell me about it, quick!" urged Caleb.

"I may be able ter help ye!"

His excitement was catching, and some impulse led the lady to confide in him.

"Twenty years ago Proctorham inherited property which ought never to have been his," Mrs. Richardson explained. "It appeared, then, to be his rightfully, for the only nearer heir—a little girl—had seemed to die. Seemed to die, I say; but, after many years, I have become convinced that her death was a sham; that he substituted another young girl for her, and that she did not die at all."

"Where is she, now?"

"I don't know, but I think that an old woman called Mother Beck could explain."

"Was the child named Claribel?"

"No; it was Eveline Vincent. She was my cousin's child, and a relative of Irving Proctorham's mother, which is why he inherited the property when little Eveline seemed to die. But why do you ask? Do you know of her?"

Eagerly Mrs. Richardson asked the question, and, having come close to the boy, she stood trembling with strong emotion.

"Let me ask one more question," replied the Castaway. "Hev you any idee what become o' that small heiress?"

"I have heard a rumor—which I am trying to verify or disprove by seeing Mother Beck—that she gave the child to some orphan asylum. Heaven knows what became of it after that!"

"Say, I b'lieve I know her!" exclaimed Caleb, in great excitement.

"You?"
"Yes."

"Do you really mean it? Do you mean it?" tremulously demanded the lady.

"I do, fur sure!"

"But where—who—"

"I know a lady—she's a woman, now, ye see, an' a mother, but she was a child twenty odd years ago—who was an orphin asylum girl, an' sent 'way down ter Maine ter be cared fur; an' she's tryin' ter find who she was; an' we think Mother Beck put her in the asylum, an' that Proctorham was in it—"

Mrs. Richardson interrupted his rapid speech. "Take me to that girl, and I will reward you well."

"She was put into the asylum by a Huldah—"

"Huldah Joy! The same; the same; old Mother Beck once went by that name!"

"We ain't found that the asylum records give only the first name—Huldah—but we hope ter find out more. But, great Scott! we're lettin' val'able time go ter waste. Foller me, an' we'll get out ef we kin!"

Caleb hurriedly added an explanation of the situation, and the need of caution was seen by Mrs. Richardson, as well as himself.

They left the room, and began an effort to get out of the house. They dared not strike a light, so Caleb had to feel the way, and go very slowly, but, for a time, luck was with them. They finally reached the lower hall, and saw the gray light of early morning struggling in through narrow windows beside the door.

But when they reached the door, it was found to be locked, and the key not visible.

What was to be done?

Cinders looked out and saw two policemen passing at a slow pace, but, just then, Mrs. Richardson uttered a cry of alarm. Her companion turned, and the sight which he saw was a startler for him, also. The man who had become his jailer was at the head of the stairs, looking down in amazement; but as Caleb turned, he uttered a fierce exclamation and came rushing down.

The Castaway realized the danger, and saw that a crisis was at hand which would soon be settled one way or the other.

Turning, he dashed his foot through one of the long lights of glass, and then his voice rung out shrilly in the cry:

"Help! help! Perleece! Help!"

The coat-tails of the two officers had just disappeared, but Caleb had no fear that they would let the disturbance go uninvestigated. He uttered one more yell, and then made an agile leap to one side as the angry thief tried to seize him. Mrs. Richardson screamed, and a blue-coated man came rushing up the steps.

The thief drew a revolver.

"Break in the door! Murder!"

Cinders added this fresh cry, but the revolver looked ugly, and he suddenly sent out his strong arm in an accurate blow. It took effect on the thief's wrist, and the revolver was knocked clean through the window.

The appearance of the weapon seemed to settle the case in the minds of the officers. They had knocked in vain, but a glance through the window had partially revealed the state of affairs. They flung themselves against the door, and it flew open with a crash.

They did not come any too soon. Caleb's enemy, almost maddened by his ill-luck, had sprung at the boy, grasping at his throat, and his superior strength might have made matters very dangerous for the Castaway; but a cry from Mrs. Richardson, added to what was visible, satisfied the officers how they ought to proceed, and one used his club and promptly knocked the thief down.

"That's the figger!" Caleb cried. "Hang to the critter now!"

"What's up here?" the blue-coat demanded.

"More things than I kin tell in a month; but you jest gobble this chap an' old Mother Beck an' we'll hev an explanation. It's the biggest riot sence the war, but we're on top. We'll stay, too, fur the rogues are all down like ten-pins. Now, Mrs. Richardson, fur Mother Beck!"

An hour later Alton Norway's anxiety in regard to Caleb Cinders was relieved by the latter's appearance, but the fact that he was accompanied by an elderly lady in an agitated frame of mind was perplexing.

Explanations came thick and fast.

Mother Beck had been alarmed into a confession, and this, coupled with what Mrs. Richardson and Cinders knew, had been enough.

The female child referred to by Mrs. Richardson had been heir to considerable property. After her, the heirs were Irving Proctorham and his sister, Mrs. Lydeckton. Coveting the property, they had formed a scheme to make it be believed that the child was dead. Really, Mrs. Lydeckton gave it to Mother Beck, alias Huldah Joy, who, carrying it to the City Outdoor Poor authorities, had represented it to be her own child and left it there.

She had told a false, unfavorable story as to its parentage.

This child, we need scarcely say, had lived to become the Mrs. Garland of our story.

After many years Mrs. Richardson, who had been a relative and valued friend of the child's mother, had gained a clew to the facts, and it was this which led Proctorham to abduct little Allan and shut him up in the stable. He had planned to decoy Mrs. Garland away, later.

Mrs. Richardson was overjoyed to find Claribel, and the latter at last knew her real name. In their satisfaction they did not forget that all this was due to a youth named Caleb "Cinders."

Irving Proctorham and his sister, Mrs. Lydeckton, were not prosecuted. The attempt on Caleb's life at the coal-yard had been made by the rich man's tools, but he had never authorized such extreme measures. It was also he and his sister who had caused Mother Beck's removal after the latter saw the evil pair in the handsome cab.

Despite all these things Mrs. Garland was reluctant to prosecute them, and, when they had handed over the property they illegally held, they were allowed to go on condition that they leave the country. They went to Paris, lived three years in great poverty, and then both died of an epidemic disease.

The thief who had captured Caleb was sent to prison, as were the men who fired the coal-shed. Mother Beck, to drown her sorrows, drowned herself in whisky and died in squalor.

Norway did not again go to get a copy of the records, but when, five months later, he was married to Mrs. Garland and started on a tour of Europe, no word had ever come from the Commissioners who had promised to write "in a day or two."

Caleb is no longer called "Cinders," but is known by his proper name, Lyons. His services were duly appreciated, Norway took him in charge, and he is now at school. When his education is completed, Norway will see that he has a good business chance.

He gives promise of having a career which will put his envious relations wholly in the shade.

THE END.

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